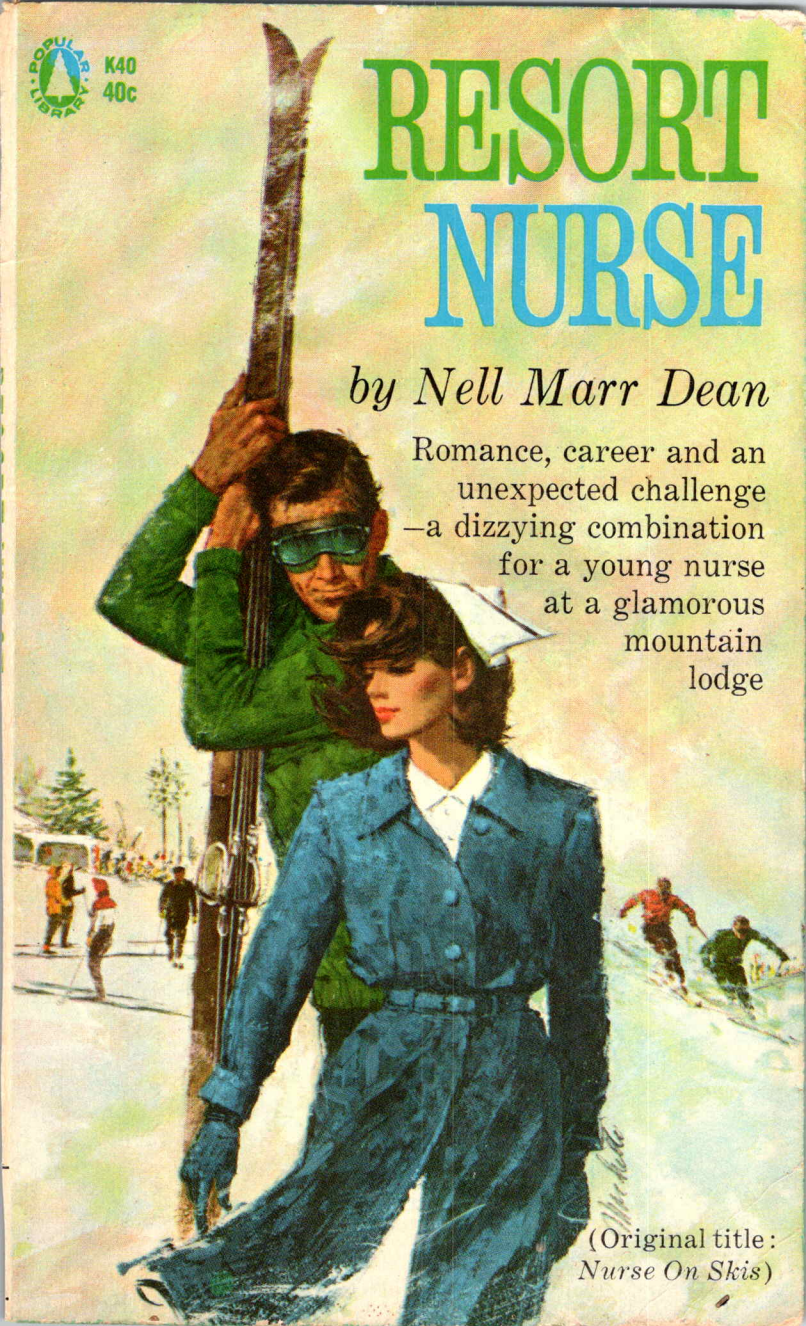
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RESORT NURSE
by Nell Marr Dean
Romance, career and an unexpected challenge —a dizzying combination for a young nurse at a glamorous mountain lodge
(Original title: Nurse On Skis)

AS A NURSE
SHE HAS HER DUTY . . .

AS A WOMAN
SHE WANTS LOVE . . .

LYNN RYAN has a dream—and to make it come true she is working as hard as she can. She has a wonderful, glamorous job as resident nurse at Tamarac Lodge. But skiing isn't her specialty—and she *has* to learn, to keep her job.

COMPLICATIONS set in that confirm her diagnosis of heart troubles—complications named Todd, Wolfgang and Steve.

COULD SHE treat her own romantic symptoms and still hold on to her dream?

RESORT NURSE was originally published at $2.95 by Avalon Books.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

NELL MARR DEAN is the prolific author of twenty-four novels. She has been a writer and editorial researcher on such newspapers as *The Tulsa Tribune* and the *San Francisco Chronicle.*

A member of the California Writers Club, Mrs. Dean is married to a newspaperman. They have two children and make their home in Carmichael, Calif.

RESORT NURSE

Original title: NURSE ON SKIS

By NELL MARR DEAN

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POPULAR LIBRARY *EAGLE BOOKS* EDITION
Published in May, 1963

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Original title: Nurse on Skis
Published by arrangement with Thomas Bouregy & Company
Thomas Bouregy edition published in April, 1960
First printing: April, 1960

Published simultaneously in the Dominion of Canada
by The Ryerson Press, Toronto

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Chapter I

The girl in the seat directly behind the bus driver, wearing a cashmere coat and a warm sparkle in her blue-green eyes, pressed her nose against the windowpane and searched for a road sign through the light-falling snow. Lynn Ryan reckoned it couldn't be more than an hour, even over these curly Sierra Nevada roads, until they reached Squaw Valley.

Squaw Valley! The Winter Olympics! Their color, excitement and drama! The nearby Tamarac Lodge, where she would serve as resident nurse! The thought of being just a small part, just a snowflake, so to speak, of this internationally famous winter playground sent her heart soaring.

But only momentarily. A feeling of guilt clutched at her for thinking only of the glamour, of the frivolity that surrounded such a resort. She was a nurse, she reminded herself soundly, on her way to do a nurse's job. And nurses were supposed to think in humanitarian terms—saving lives, dispensing pills, pushing thermometers into people's mouths, counting their pulse beats . . .

But was there any law against dreaming of excitement? Of moonlight on the snow, of good-looking sports togs, of the sharp tang of mountain air in your face as you bobsledded down a steep slope?

Again Lynn wiped the steam from the bus window in a small circle with the palm of her hand and peered outside. The tall pines, their arms outstretched and laden with snow, stood like ghosts on the steep mountainside. Occasionally, a

track marred the immaculate white blanket of snow, and she wondered if it was a ski trail or a road leading to some hideaway mountain cabin.

She flinched inwardly. Skiing! Would she really be able to learn as easily and quickly as she had promised Mr. Radin, the manager of the Tamarac? It was important that she did, for knowing how to ski was a requisite of her job. One could not tell when she might be called out on the ski run to administer first aid to a guest who had sprained an ankle or broken a rib. Only because she was otherwise so well qualified had Mr. Radin excused the fact that she couldn't ski a step. And only with the understanding she would begin taking lessons from the ski instructor at the lodge as soon as she arrived. But she reassured herself there would be nothing to it. Hadn't Vanderburg, himself an expert skier, said that learning was as easy as falling off a log?

Indeed, Dr. Vanderburg was the one who told her about the job in the first place. He had just returned from one of his frequent ski trips to the Tamarac. Quite by accident he and Lynn met in the men's ward at Memorial Hospital in Los Angeles, where she was working and where he had gone on a consultation, and he mentioned the opening at Tamarac. Until then, she hadn't realized that ski lodges, like small industries, had nurses on duty to take care of their guests. Suddenly Dr. Vanderburg was suggesting it might be a splendid opportunity for her. She had written Mr. Radin—and after an exchange of letters, here she was on a bus bound for the Tamarac!

She hated to admit even to herself that the generous salary the job paid had much to do with her delight in getting the job. Not that the extra money she would earn was important to her personally. But she had a special reason, a very special reason for wanting it.

It had to do with her stepmother. Carmen Marie, Lynn's father's Spanish wife, had endured enough near-poverty, enough scrimping and sacrifice! The time had come when she was to have better. Lynn already had laid the foundation. A quick wave of happiness swept through her when she thought of her talk with the man at the Fernando Acres office last Wednesday. It was a Wednesday which well could prove to be the most significant day in Carmen Marie's life with Lynn's father.

Lynn had loved Carmen Marie deeply and devotedly, from

the first time she saw her. She well remembered how Carmen Marie had taken her into her arms after the Spanish custom of showing special affection, and how she felt the vibrant sincerity of the woman's voice as she exclaimed simply, "My girl, my girl."

From that moment on, until she had gone into nurses' training, she had been Carmen Marie's daughter for half of every year. Being a child of divorce, Lynn had been divided, too. Six months with Carmen Marie and her father, six months with her real mother and stepfather—in homes that were as completely different as are the bizarre artificiality of Hollywood and the pine-covered mountains of the Sierra Nevadas.

Her mother was married to James Westmore, a former professional wrestler who owned a prosperous restaurant. Lynn winced at the thought of the ugly bickering that went on between her divorced parents and made her childhood a nightmarish ordeal. Her mother conniving to get her custody. Harry Ryan, bitter and resentful over his rejection by his former wife for the brawny wrestler, stubbornly refusing to give up so much as an hour of the time the courts had awarded him with Lynn.

Carmen Marie, with her noble forbearance and joyous nature, and her strong ability to understand, was a buffer between Lynn and her angry parents. Never could Lynn forget that love. And now that she had her handsomely paying new job at the Tamarac, she could in some measure repay it. Carmen Marie would tingle with joy when she found out what was going to happen. And Triola, Lynn's young half-sister, would be ecstatic!

The bus slowed down. Lynn looked ahead through the arc on the windshield made by the wipers and saw that this was a construction zone. She realized that someone had flagged down the bus. The door swung open, and a man, tall and snow-covered, entered, brushing the snowflakes from his parka.

The driver flipped down the spare seat next to his. "Ride here, Mister? It's warmer."

"Thanks," the man said, his voice deep and pleasant. "Brother! Is it cold out there!"

Even though the man was warmly dressed, he appeared to be chilled to the bone. His cheeks were as red as Santa Claus's. Lynn guessed he was twenty-five. She did not have

to guess that he was very handsome. That she could see for herself.

Removing his mittens, the man rubbed his hands together, blew on them. Lynn heard him tell the bus driver, "That wind would freeze an Eskimo's ears right off his head."

"They'll have to bring out more snowplows if the snow keeps coming down like this," the driver predicted.

"You're so right. And if the weather doesn't break soon," the man said, "We'll never get this stretch of highway widened."

"Oh, you're working on the road?"

"Yeah."

"Equipment operator?"

"No. An engineer on Project Nine. But even if it wasn't for the snow, it's too cold to pour concrete."

His remarks made Lynn feel half-naked in her light beige coat. She glanced down at her alligator pumps and then, beneath the seat, at his feet. He had on engineers' boots that came almost to the knees and, she imagined, a couple of pairs of woolen socks beneath them. Well, thank heaven she'd had the foresight to bring along her plastic rain shoes. In them she wouldn't look quite so freakish when she got off the bus. But what could you expect of a girl from Los Angeles who'd never seen snow except on the distant mountain peaks?

The driver spoke again, but his tone was serious. "You highway engineers had better get these mountain roads in shape, or you won't begin to take care of the swarms who'll be here for the Olympics."

"Sometimes I'm not so sure they ought to hold the Winter Games at Squaw Valley," the man said skeptically.

"What! And hold them in some foreign country? What's wrong with the good old U.S.A.?"

The man smiled slightly. "Nothing. Only California snow isn't a very dependable commodity."

"In these mountains it sure is."

"Don't be too sure. Sometimes there's too much. Other times, the fall is too light."

"Well, I'm betting it's just right," the driver insisted loyally. "About four feet."

The bus came to a sudden halt at a steep-roofed roadside building. Lynn looked out at the sign across the wooden balcony: BLUE CANYON TAVERN. The driver swung around in

Chapter III

In a uniform as white as the fresh blanket of snow that had fallen during the night, Lynn unlocked the door to the White Room for her first day of duty. To her it still seemed incredible that she was earning her living in such surroundings. Most people paid thirty dollars a day for the privilege of just a room at the Tamarac. And hers cost nothing. It was like having a paid vacation on an expense account.

But once she had pulled the shades to let in the early sun, shining gloriously down on the winter fairyland, her existence seemed less fanciful. The familiar sight of the small enameled medical-supply chest, the sterilizers, the neatly made cots that Nurse Schofield had left in readiness, the locked cabinet of drugs and dressings, all brought a sense of reality to the room. Maybe the world outside was a sports lovers' paradise and the hotel lobby a mecca for fun and laughter; the White Room was a workroom, neat and efficient, in readiness to care for those who became ill or were hurt.

And there was something more permanent about this room than most emergency rooms. It closely resembled a doctor's treatment room, with its beam lights, its stationary examining table. She wondered if the table was where Dr. Fritchy worked when he was called in to set a broken bone. Remembering how a few minutes earlier she had watched some of the neophytes clumping shakily along on their skis, she decided it was small wonder people cracked up. Suddenly she found herself wondering if she would be lucky

instructor at a sporting lodge. One has the opportunity to work with champion material—the privilege of teaching the beautiful women who come to the lodge." He stopped, clicked his heels together in military fashion, and stood rigidly at attention. "And when would you like to take your first lesson?"

"Tomorrow, if it's agreeable with you," she said hastily, pleased that he was being so cooperative but wishing she were more at ease with him. She was unaccustomed to foreigners and their continental manners. "As you understand, being the nurse here, it's necessary that I learn very soon."

He bowed again. "Of course."

"My schedule is somewhat inflexible at times. Would it be satisfactory if I postponed my lessons on occasions? You see, an emergency might arise, and—"

"My time is your time, Miss Ryan," he said as if it would be a privilege to arrange his entire schedule specially to suit hers. "And we shall settle right down to hard work and make use of every minute. After no time at all, you'll be gliding down the slopes like the wind."

Her spirits soared. And Steve Matson had made it sound so terrifically hard. Well, just let him wait a week or two, and she would show him!

Inwardly she smiled at her own presumptuousness. Whatever made her think she'd really ever see Steve Matson again?

At eight o'clock that same evening Lynn appeared in the ski shop. She knew the minute she walked in that the tall, athletically built man dressed in the dashing ski clothes who was leaning against the fireplace and gazing intently at the flames was the ski instructor. The proprietor of the shop, whom she had met that afternoon, recognized her immediately and called to him: "Wolfgang! A young lady to see you."

Wolfgang turned slowly, deliberately, and stood poised for a moment, his huge hulk silhouetted against the fire. Then an easy smile crept over his snow-tanned Grecian profile. "Ah, good evening," he said with a slight Nordic accent, and bowed from his waist.

His courtliness momentarily awed Lynn. "I—I understand, Mr. Grunheit, you give ski lessons."

He took a few steps toward her. "Yes, I teach." His wandering grey eyes traveled the length of her. Then, almost playfully, he challenged, "Now, don't tell me *you* need a ski instructor."

She gave a small, hollow laugh. "I'm afraid I do."

He still refused to believe her. "*Ach!* What you need is a little brushing up. Yes?"

"Really, Mr. Grunheit, I'll need more than a little brushing up. To put it frankly, I've never been on skis in my life."

"Impossible!" he persisted. "One would assume being our nurse you could ski like a champion."

"How did you know I was a nurse?" she asked flatly.

He grinned charmingly, showing a row of white teeth. "How could I not know?" he inquired. "You were the most talked about person in the dining hall tonight."

For some reason Lynn did not know quite how to interpret this remark. She quickly brought the conversation back to the matter at hand. "I'm quite anxious to learn."

"Oh, lessons—you want?"

"Yes. I understand you're a very excellent teacher. Someone at dinner tonight said you had trained some champions."

"Dozens," he acknowledged broadly. "Both skiers and figure skaters. But never an Olympic champion—yet. Now I coach Kay Lane and Karl Kirstein. Maybe they will win the Olympics for me."

"That would be quite a victory, wouldn't it!"

"Victory! *Ach*, it would be a triumph. Triumph!" He sighed. "Yes, that is one of the rewards of being a ski

like that. Nothing but the best for the Tamarac." She glanced at Cedric and said bossily, "Now you see to it, Cedric, that Lynn gets introduced to everybody and shown all around the hotel."

"We've had a wonderful tour already," Lynn assured her.

"Some establishment," Pearl stated proudly. "And with the prices they charge for accommodations, no wonder it draws the wealthy people." She leaned across the table and said in a low, confidential tone, "Listen. Either of you heard about Mrs. Strovel—the rich dame from Mass.?" Quickly she clarified her abbreviation. "Massachusetts."

"No. What?" Cedric pressed, eager as always to hear gossip.

"She's finally going to get her daughter married off to that Italian count with the crooked nose."

"No fooling!" Cedric demanded unbelievingly.

"Yes." Pearl's voice became coated with sarcasm. "Brother! These rich women! American boys aren't good enough for their darling daughters. They've got to hang around a swank ski lodge like this and land some foreigner with a title."

"Pearl," Cedric said amazed, "I never saw anybody who could pick up information like you can. You ought to work for a newspaper."

Pearl trilled her high laugh. "Then I wouldn't ever know any news, Cedric. A girl's got to work in a beauty shop to really be on the inside of things."

"Gad, Pearl, you could get gossip out of a hermit," Cedric said as a dubious compliment.

Pearl disregarded the remark and turned to Lynn. "Come on down to the shop when you need a hairdo. I'll work you in anytime." She winked playfully at Cedric. "And we'll gab."

"I'll be there very soon," Lynn promised. "This climate has wrecked my hair."

"It makes it limp as a string," Pearl amplified, rising to leave.

After Pearl had gone, Cedric confided to Lynn: "A nice person. But when you go to have your hair fixed, be careful and wear a clothespin on your tongue. Otherwise she'll wheedle you out of all your secrets, believe me."

Lynn laughed lightly. "Nurses don't tell their secrets."

substitute for beginners. He explained also the different varieties of wax and their uses. Hard wax was for cold and dry snow, medium wax for warmer days and moist snow, and *klister* for wet snow.

"But just listen to me telling you all this," he said in conclusion. "You probably know more about skiing than I ever will."

Lynn gave a light laugh and said facetiously that she skied with the grace of a water buffalo. "But I'm amazed there's so much to it."

"Skiing hasn't always been primarily a sport."

"Oh?"

"No, indeed. Skiing is one of the oldest means of getting from one place to another—next to walking."

"I hadn't thought of it that way."

"In fact, skiing didn't become a sport until after it no longer was basically a means of transportation."

"If I had to depend on skis to get somewhere, I'm afraid I'd have to stay home," Lynn averred.

It was Cedric, too, who later informed Lynn on the protocol in the employees' dining quarters, adjacent to the main dining room. It was a small and charming room where, he explained, food was served family-style at three long tables, to the accompaniment of a crackling fire, diffused lights, and lots of good conversation. He predicted that she, like the rest of the employees, would much prefer its informality to the staid decorum of the main dining room. Here, too, the food was served without cost to the employees, as set forth in the blanket maintenance clause in their working contracts.

When Lynn and Cedric entered the room together and took seats at the end of one of the big tables, she noticed immediately the warm camaraderie of the diners. Almost before the introductions had been concluded she felt a part of the big Tamarac family. Pearl Paulson, the beauty operator, who had a round baby-doll face, bleached hair, and bright blue eyes, sat opposite her. She smiled and said in a high-pitched staccato voice, "Blanche Schofield didn't tell us you were so young, Lynn."

"Lynn's no novice, Pearl," Cedric explained. "She's worked for a year and a half at a big hospital in L.A."

Pearl gave Lynn a furtive wink. "Well, we know you're a good nurse, or Leon Radin wouldn't have hired you. He's

a part of the organization. The interview ended with Mr. Radin explaining that her living quarters would be in the west wing of the hotel and that the clinic—the White Room, as it had come to be called—was located in the south wing overlooking Papoose Peak. He suggested that after she had rested she might like a swim in the heated pool, and that when she was ready, Cedric Pinkus, the desk clerk, would take her on a personally guided tour through the hotel. Then he said, "Meet me in the lobby at eight this evening, and we will visit the White Room." He then summoned a bellboy and ordered him to escort Lynn to her room.

Lynn took all of Mr. Radin's suggestions seriously except the one to go swimming. She simply could not reconcile herself to swimming in the dead of winter, even if it was an indoor, heated pool. So she spent some of the afternoon unpacking her things, exclaiming to herself over the heavenly view from her room, and later enlisting Mr. Pinkus to take her on the promised tour around the hotel.

She met him at four, dressed casually in her nutmeg wool skirt and a matching bulky sweater. She found Cedric to be a tall, ascetic-looking man of about thirty with hair the color of straw. Immediately he whisked her off to the labyrinth of lounges, writing and card rooms, cocktail bars, television rooms, shops, craft rooms, the beauty parlor —and to the ski shop, secluded in the basement.

Of all the charming spots in the huge hotel, Lynn thought, the ski shop was the most interesting, with its smell of hickory and ash, ski wax and leather. She was disappointed, however, when the proprietor told her that the ski instructor, Wolfgang Grunheit, was out on the slalom course giving a lesson and was not expected back until evening. Perhaps it was because skiing was of such immediate importance to her that she hated waiting even so much as a few hours to sign up for lessons, but she told the shop proprietor that she would return after dinner. Then she rejoined Cedric, who was browsing around among the large inventory of ski paraphernalia—poles and boots, skis and bindings, parkas and eye-catching styles of imported sweaters and ski pants. On one table was an elaborate display of dark sun goggles and on another such necessary ski items as sunburn lotions, boot lacings, mittens, and climbing skins. Cedric explained that the climbing skins made of seal fur were the most desirable, but that the plush and rough canvas ones were an adequate

around here is break bones. Or that we expect you to be busy around the clock with patients. In fact, we like our employees to have a good time—to fit right into the picture of the easy, relaxed life. Our guests prefer it that way. That's why we take such pains in picking our personnel."

"How very nice," she acknowledged, understandably a little awed to find things so different from the strict hospital routine.

"You know, Miss Ryan, you came to us very highly recommended."

"Thank you, sir."

"My friend Dr. Vanderburg tells me you have the capabilities to get on very well with people. That's good. We have to deal with all kinds of people. Foreigners, temperamental stars from the entertainment world, tough athletes—all kinds. And it's the nurse's job to see that they get the attention they need when they're ill, just as it's Pearl Paulson's job to get their hair fixed the way they want it. Perhaps I should explain. Miss Paulson is our beauty operator."

"I didn't realize there was a beauty salon here."

"One of the best," Mr. Radin confirmed, with a proud snap in his black eyes. "Pearl's a fine operator. The guests rave about her work. She can cut, style, dye—anything." He paused to smile. "Of course, her personality might have a lot to do with her popularity. She's the kind of a person everybody likes. And, believe me, nothing happens around this hotel that Pearl doesn't know about first."

"I hope I can fit into my job as well," Lynn said.

"Miss Ryan, you'll do fine. I couldn't ask for better recommendations than you have. And remember what I said. We want you to enjoy your stay of employment here. Feel free to use the hotel facilities whenever you can avail yourself of them. And mingle with the guests all you can."

Again she thanked him, continuing to be amazed at the unexpected side emoluments of the job.

"Of course, you understand you're on call six days a week, with Monday off. But that doesn't mean you can't leave the hotel when you're not busy. The only requirement is that you leave word at the desk where you can be reached in case you're needed." His voice lifted proudly. "Miss Ryan, I'm sure you won't find working conditions any better at the resorts at Sun Valley than you will here at the Tamarac."

Lynn thanked him again for making her feel so much

"Oh, I brought skiing equipment with me," she replied, pleased that she could prove to him she was serious about the matter. "And, believe me, I certainly had a lot."

"It takes a lot. And costs like the dickens, doesn't it?"

It cost exactly, Lynn reflected silently, *two hundred and fifty dollars.*

In further warning Mr. Radin added, "But sporty clothes and good equipment don't make an expert skier. It takes practice. Practice and a lot of spills and nerve before you're competent enough to travel safely on these slopes." He twisted his little black mustache irritably. "Blast it! I wish more of our guests would realize that. We'd have fewer accidents."

"It's probably very easy to get overenthusiastic."

"Beginners are regular fools," he proclaimed, without even bothering to exclude present company. "They put on a pair of skis and think they're as good as the champion, Christian Pravda. And the first thing they know, they've taken a spill and broken a leg or half a dozen ribs."

"Goodness!"

Mr. Radin smiled and quickly qualified his remark. "Don't take me too literally, Miss Ryan. All in all, our guests are a pretty healthy bunch of people. This good clear air steers off colds and pneumonia."

Regardless of his brief optimism, Lynn asked if there was a hospital nearby—just in case one was needed in an emergency.

"We use the one in Reno sometimes." He pointed out the window toward the east. "Reno is just beyond Lake Tahoe, about thirty miles from here. Or if the roads are bad, we go in the other direction. Down to Colfax."

"I remember Colfax. We came through there on the bus."

"There's a Dr. Fritchy there. Very accommodating fellow. He's always good about driving up if we call him when we've got a bad accident case."

Lynn smiled. "With all these broken bones around here to be set, this Dr. Fritchy must be a pretty good orthopedic surgeon by now."

Mr. Radin arched his brows. "I'll tell you how good he is. Last winter they sent some medical students out from an Eastern hospital to watch him set bones."

"Really?"

"Indeed." He grinned. "But don't think that all people do

"You'll see plenty of it up here. Sometimes it snows three feet in a night. But it rarely gets unbearably cold. That's what makes this one of the most desirable spots in the whole country for winter sports. You can have fun without freezing."

"That must have been one reason it was chosen for the Olympics," Lynn said.

"Indeed."

She glanced out the big window. "And it's so picturesque. I feel I'm in a winter wonderland."

"Don't be fooled, though," warned Mr. Radin. "It's tremendously scenic—but it's also very rough country. That's why we need a full-time nurse the year round. Being in such an out-of-the-way place, and isolated as we are at times by bad weather, it gives our guests a feeling of security to know there's a nurse on the premises."

"A nurse does offer a certain security," Lynn agreed.

"Positively. And when I found out our reliable Miss Schofield was leaving us after seven years, I decided we must have a replacement immediately."

"Seven years!" Lynn mused in astonishment, wondering if she'd still be here after such a long time.

"The work got extremely difficult for her. She's fifty."

Lynn gave a little laugh. "Oh, she's still young."

"Oh, she was active, all right. And able to take care of her nursing duties efficiently. But I mean the rough skiing was too much for her," he explained. "As I told you in my letter, our guests are frequently getting hurt out on the trails, and sometimes the nurse has to go out on skis and give some emergency aid."

"That means I'd better hurry up and learn to ski."

"Indeed," he said flatly. "I advise it very strongly."

"It was terribly nice of you, Mr. Radin, to let me have the job when I'm such a beginner." She did not dare tell him she'd *never* been on skis in her life. "But don't you worry. I'll learn fast."

"You'd better—for your own protection. Like I say, you can't tell when you'll be called out on the ski run, and these slopes are treacherous."

"I'll start taking lessons immediately," Lynn promised.

"Good. You'll find our ski instructor, Wolfgang Grunheit, very capable, I'm sure." He paused. "He'll give you a special rate on the lessons—and on any equipment you have to buy."

warmth of the lobby engulfed her. She stood half-numb, letting the heat seep into her pores, as she admired the simple, rustic beauty of the massive room. There was a rough elegance about the walls of natural stone and soft wood paneling, the rich-toned leather-upholstered furniture, the giant chandeliers fashioned from native wood and copper.

At the registration desk Lynn was warmly welcomed by the clerk on duty when she made her identity known. A minute later she was ushered into the manager's office by a bellboy.

Mr. Radin was temporarily out, but the bellboy invited her to wait there. Standing at the enormous picture window, which took up one wall of the office, she presumed the miles of mountainside trails she saw marked off with poles and flags must be ski runs. From here they seemed more graduated than they had from the window of the bus. Now, too, she saw how many other windows in the lodge looked out upon the vast panorama of snow-covered mountains and white-cloaked pine trees.

Suddenly it did not make sense that any nurse could earn two hundred and fifty dollars a month, have all her expenses paid, including laundry, and wake up every morning to such breath-taking scenery. And what was even more incredible was that here there would be no strict hospital routine, no commanding supervisor's voice, no long, grueling duty in emergency, no tiresome floor duty.

But she knew it did not mean that her responsibility as a nurse would be any less. Perhaps greater. In a hospital there were lots of other people; there were doctors to give nurses their orders. Here she was on her own. . . .

A door swung open, and a man walked briskly across the room. "Miss Ryan, I believe," he said in a friendly but firm voice. "I'm Mr. Radin, the manager."

She gave him her hand. "Hello, Mr. Radin," she said, smiling, surprised that such a small man occupied such an immense office. "I've been enjoying your wonderul view out this window."

"Very scenic, isn't it? And very wintry. I didn't know whether the bus would get through today with this bad weather."

"They were keeping the roads open with snowplows," she informed him. "It was quite interesting to watch them. We don't have snow where I live in Southern California."

Chapter II

Less than a half-hour after Lynn had said good-bye to Steve Matson she caught her first glimpse of the world-renowned Tamarac Lodge. She had alighted from the bus on the main highway at the entrance to Squaw Valley and was met by the Volkswagen bus which transported the hotel guests the five miles over a winding side road to the Tamarac.

The snow had ceased falling when the station wagon came in full view of the mountain lodge. Its beauty left Lynn gasping and instantly reminded her of the postcard of Berchtesgaden, Adolf Hitler's retreat in the Bavarian Alps, that her mother had sent last summer from Europe. The great sprawling structure, its roof weighted with a thick blanket of snow, seemed hung to the white mountain. At its back rose magnificent white peaks, and its façade looked out over a panorama of valleys and canyons and crevasses. Lynn wondered if it was down these dangerous slopes that the people skied and rode their bobsleds.

The Volkswagen came to a halt beneath the rustic portico at the main entrance to the Tamarac. Groups of people in brightly colored sports togs, skis and skates, stood talking, smoking, idling, some obviously waiting to see what new visitors the bus had brought. As she walked shivering toward the lobby she was surprised, and pleasantly so, that several gave her welcoming nods. Lynn immediately concluded that the Tamarac, despite its aura of sophistication, was a cordial place after all.

Again she was reminded how cold she was when the cozy

and the Riviera during the winter season." He gave her a rueful glance. "When the season's in full swing, you'll have your hands full being a nurse. There's nothing like a bunch of hotel guests to crack up on the ski run."

"People have no business skiing until they learn how," she projected.

"Those are just the people who do it," the man amplified. "Some of them haven't skied or skated a day in their lives. But they come here on a short vacation and think they can learn overnight."

"Oh?" she interposed. "I thought it was fairly simple."

"Skiing is a hard sport to master. It takes a lot of practice."

She was about to ask him exactly how much, when the waiter caught their attention and pointed through the window. "The bus is loading up, folks."

Lynn and her companion slid from the counter stools. "This is the end of the line for me," he said. "But I'll get you on the bus so you won't fall down again." He guided her toward the door. When they stepped onto the ice he was grasping her arm so tightly that a totally unexpected thrill skied up her spine. Above the groan of the cold mountain wind he said to her, "You didn't tell me your name."

"Lynn Ryan."

"I'm Steve Matson." He gave a low, casual laugh. "If you need any road information, call me at the highway department. Maybe I'd be able to help you."

At the bottom step of the bus she paused. "And if you cut your finger," she said, smiling, "drop in at the Tamarac. I'll put on a Band-Aid."

He gave her a warm glance. "Don't be surprised if I do."

told the waiter, "Two coffees, please. The lady's in a hurry." He turned to Lynn. "Are you going all the way to Salt Lake City on the bus?"

"No. Just to Squaw Valley station."

"Oh. Up for some skiing?"

"No. I'm going to live near there." When she saw his puzzled expression, she quickly elaborated. "I mean, I'm going to work there. If you can call it work—doing anything in this wonderful scenery."

"It is pretty wonderful," he agreed. "Will you be in one of the Olympic offices."

"I'll be at the Tamarac Lodge. I'm the new resident nurse."

He said in a pleased voice, "Oh, you are?"

"It's all rather exciting," she confessed. "I start work Monday morning."

"You couldn't go to work in a nicer lodge. I know it well. Of all the big hotels around here I think the Tamarac's about the best."

"I've seen postcards of it. It's really beautiful."

"Just like a Swiss chalet," he pinpointed, "and a lot different from those plush hotels over the line in Nevada where gambling's the big thing."

"Do you live in the area?"

"Only temporarily, while we're working on this road-construction job. I'm from Arizona originally." He smiled. "And I don't live at one of those fancy hotels like yours—not on my state salary."

"Where do you live up here?"

"At a little motel just a few steps down from here on Highway 40. All the highway crew do."

"From what I understand you'll need a lot of roads—with visitors coming from everywhere for the Olympics."

"They'll come from all over the world. We're widening this road now. And you're right. We'll need a couple of four-laners if the crowd is anything like it was last weekend. And those people just came to see the tryouts. Wait until the Games really start."

"The hotels around Squaw Valley must have all been very crowded."

"Everything was jammed. I'll bet the Tamarac was booked up months in advance. That's where a lot of the European visitors stay. The regulars who come here from St. Moritz

his seat and spoke to the passengers: "Fifteen minutes' stop, folks. Last one before Squaw Valley."

The passengers began filing quickly from the bus, and Lynn fumbled in the luggage rack for her plastic rain shoes. She was the last one off. Although she felt she was turning into a solid pillar of ice the instant she stepped onto the snow, she was even more stunned to hear herself receiving orders from the highway engineer at the bottom of the bus steps. "Run like the dickens," he ordered. "It's five below out here."

That, as it turned out, was very bad advice. She had taken no more than two fast steps on the slick, ice-coated pathway when her feet flew out from under her, and she landed on the frozen ground with a great, ungraceful *flop*. Stars mingled with the falling snowflakes in front of her eyes, and out of nowhere came a man's anxious voice: "Are you hurt, Miss?"

She momentarily was much more concerned about the discovery that her dress was a brazen twelve inches above her kneecaps. She began modestly yanking it into proper position, insisting she was not hurt. It was just a tiny spill, she said.

"Why, you came down like an avalanche," he contradicted, starting to help her to her feet. But he said it in a friendly way, and it did not make it sound uncomplimentary. In the following few instants Lynn suddenly realized she had been scooped up into his arms and he was striding into the tavern with her. "We'll go inside," he said, "and see if you broke any bones."

Inside the rustic roadside restaurant, he deposited her upright on the plank floor in front of a huge stone fireplace. She took a few trial steps. "See! I'm not hurt a bit."

"You were lucky. You'll sure have to watch out on this ice. It's slick as glass and twice as hard."

She smiled impishly. "I found that out."

He smiled back. "I didn't really mean for you to run. I meant hurry." He glanced toward the counter. "You'd better have something warm to drink. The bus will be taking off in a few minutes."

"I would enjoy a cup of coffee," she said, wondering how any man who had such a rugged toughness about him and who was nearly as big as a moose could have such a gentle voice and such sensitive eyes.

They sat at the birchwood counter, and the man brusquely

enough to emerge unscathed. At any rate, at four this afternoon, when she reported for her first lesson, she'd discover how apt a student she was.

Divorcing her mind temporarily from skiing, she began a more thorough inspection of her new quarters than the hurried one she had made last night with Mr. Radin. Nurse Schofield must indeed be a methodical person. Every instrument lay exactly in place in the chest, every book straight on the kneehole desk that stood in a small cubicle divided from the treatment room by a graceful white arch. Here, too, everything was white—the leather-upholstered swivel chair at the desk, the rubber tile on the floor, even the telephone. Almost at the precise moment that Lynn glanced at the phone, it rang.

She picked up the receiver. "Miss Ryan speaking," she said.

"Hello, nurse. This is the operator at the desk," a voice said tersely. "I just got a call from room 412. A man said his wife was having a heart attack. Can you go right up?"

"Yes—of course," Lynn replied quickly. "What is the room number again?"

In a clipped voice the operator said, "Never mind. I'll send a bellboy to take you up. He'll be right there."

The connection was broken abruptly. Lynn plunged the receiver back into its cradle, feeling suddenly grateful that she had come on the inspection tour of the White Room with Mr. Radin last night. At least she knew where the portable oxygen tank was. She lifted it from the shelf. Now, what else would she need for an emergency cardiac? There would be plenty of pillows in the room; no need to take any. She could send to the restaurant for a stimulant.

She hardly had finished assembling her supplies and thoughts before there was a soft rap on the door. She grabbed her bag, and opening the door to the bellboy, she instructed him to carry the oxygen tank.

"We'll save time, Miss Ryan, by taking the service elevator," he said, leading the way toward the back corridor.

As the elevator lifted slowly the bellboy said, "I hope you don't run into anything serious."

"I hope not too," she replied, noticing what a clean-cut, nice-looking boy he was. His appearance bore out the theory that the management put a lot of care into the selection of their employees.

"I'm not surprised the woman had a heart attack," he

elaborated knowingly. "The way they were fighting when I served them dinner in their suite last night. And just newlyweds, too."

"Newlyweds and quarreling?"

"Like bulldogs! She threw a bottle of perfume at him. Called him a lot of names. Even threatened to have their marriage annulled if he didn't quit being so jealous."

"That's sad," Lynn said abstractedly, silently speculating that the woman must be under a severe emotional strain to behave so hysterically.

"She bawled, too. Just like a baby." He sighed, pushed open the elevator door. "The guests don't have many secrets from bellhops. I tell Pearl we know as much about the guests as she does."

Minutes later Lynn was bending over the young bride, Mrs. Fielding. She listened for her pulse and took note of her flushed face. Although she had a strong hunch the woman had not had a heart attack, Lynn nonetheless ordered Mr. Fielding to throw open the windows, and she began to prop the patient into a sitting position. Pointedly she asked the husband, "What makes you think it's her heart?"

At that instant Mrs. Fielding clutched her body in the area of her heart. "I'm having an attack now," she cried, frightened. "I—I can barely get my—breath."

Instantly Lynn's mind flew to hyperventilation, a condition which occurred when breathing came too fast and too deeply. It closely resembled a heart attack but was not one. Tersely she said to Mr. Fielding, "Please get me a paper bag. Quickly."

He looked nonplused. "A bag?"

"Hurry! Any kind," she ordered. "Maybe she has one in her dresser drawer."

He ruffled through the top drawer, found a pink-striped bag, dumped its contents on the dresser, and thrust it at Lynn. He may have been fighting earlier with his wife, but now he was genuinely concerned for her welfare.

Lynn placed the sack over the woman's mouth. "Blow in it," she ordered.

The woman made an attempt to resist.

"Blow hard," Lynn urged firmly.

Mrs. Fielding blew. Her husband demanded, "What are you doing that to her for?"

"I want her to breathe in her own expelled carbon dioxide to restore her blood balance. I think your wife is bothered with an emotional tension—not a heart attack."

Mrs. Fielding seemed to be instantly revived. Almost immediately she said, "I feel better already. I can breathe. A minute ago I thought I was going to die."

"A false heart attack can seem just as real as a coronary," Lynn said. She directed her next remark to Mr. Fielding. "But that doesn't mean she shouldn't consult a doctor about her condition. Please understand, I am not diagnosing her case. As a nurse I am only here to help in an emergency. Until you have the opportunity to see a doctor, I suggest you keep her very calm emotionally."

Mrs. Fielding glared at her husband and, on the verge of tears, pleaded, "Do you hear, Johnny? The nurse says we mustn't quarrel. It might—"

"Oh, sweetheart!" the young husband said passionately, falling to his knees at his wife's bedside. "I'm sorry. It's all my fault. I'll never be jealous again. I shouldn't have cared if you danced with that fellow all night. I should have known it didn't mean anything."

Lynn went over and pulled down the windows, picked up her bag. Young love. Young marriage. How many pitfalls there were sometimes in the first few months of matrimony! It was plain the Fieldings' trouble no longer required the services of a nurse. . . .

Mr. Radin was waiting for Lynn when she arrived back at the White Room, to give her Dr. Fritchy's telephone number for her files. Then a patient—a Chinese cook named Wong Duck—was led in with his arm wrapped in a bloody towel. The man who accompanied him explained to Lynn that Wong Duck had cut his wrist when he'd been slicing chickens for the chow mein, tonight's entree. Wong Duck, Lynn found, was not injured as badly as he appeared to be, and in twenty minutes his arm was cleaned and bandaged and he was ready to return to the chicken detail in the kitchen.

Several other patients came in with minor complaints, and one hotel guest brought her eighteen-month-old son in for advice on what to do with the broken front teeth he

acquired when he fell face-first on the stone hearth. Lynn suggested to the mother that she take him to Reno to a dentist so that the little teeth could be properly smoothed down and X-rayed for any permanent damage. By the time noon came Lynn had seen a sizable total of people for one morning and had gained a number of additional facts about persons and things around the hotel: that there were thirty full-time employees, including chefs, maids, office personnel, bellhops, and storekeepers. That next week the North American Alpine and Nordic Ski Championships would be held at Squaw Valley—and that one of the contestants was from the Soviet Union.

At three-thirty Lynn left word with the desk clerk that she expected to be on Snowball Hill for the remainder of the afternoon and could be reached there if she was needed. As she hurried to her room to change into ski togs the prospect of taking her first ski lesson sent small fears sweeping through her. What if she fell flat on her face and broke her nose the first time she tried to stand up on the skis? What if the people on Snowball Hill gawked and stared and laughed at her?

But minutes later, posing in front of the full-length mirrow in her elasticized ski pants and smart poplin parka with its drawstring hip line, she felt less apprehensive. *Nothing tried, nothing gained,* she bolstered herself as she gathered up her skis and poles, wax and goggles, and set out. In minutes she was in the ski shop, greeting Wolfgang Grunheit: "Are you ready to teach a cow how to ski?"

He smiled, relieved her of her gear, and in his suave voice murmured, "H-m-m! You look like you're wearing an Emilio Pucci creation."

"You're very nice," she said politely, quite delighted that he had mistaken her modest sportswear for an original. Or did he say that to all the women? She thought he looked quite attractive himself in his flashy sweater and navy blue ski pants. His pants, unlike hers, slipped over his boots and made his already long legs seem even longer.

"Would you like a cup of coffee before we start?" he offered.

"Thank you, no." She glanced at the door impatiently. "I'm—I'm terribly anxious to begin."

"It's a good day for skiing. The snow is hard and dry."

She cupped the hood of her parka around her blond hair and gave a little groan. "I hope I don't make a fool of myself."

"At a ski lodge nobody pays any attention to the next fellow," he said, pulling on his red skull cap. "They're all too busy with their own skiing problems. Besides, you're going to take to skiing like a champion." He slipped into his windbreaker and gathered up the gear, tossing the skis onto his broad shoulders as though they were no heavier than matchsticks. "Better put on your goggles and protect those beautiful eyes from the glare. We've got to walk about four blocks to the ski run."

Outside, in the big world of white, people seemed infinitesimal against the vast, pristine backdrop. In the distance, skiers cavorting on the steep slopes stood our sharply in the clear mountain air but seemed no larger than black insects against the snow.

The farther from the lodge Lynn and Wolfgang walked, the sparser became the people. She drew the hood of her parka still closer around her face to daunt the stiff, sharp breeze. "Looks like most everybody is staying inside. Not many skiers are out."

"There shouldn't be any on Snowball Hill this hour of day. It's used mostly for my children's morning classes," Wolfgang explained.

She laughed. "Ha! So you're taking me to the same place you take the kiddies."

"Everybody has to start in the kindergarten," he proclaimed seriously. "That's what Snowball is. The beginners' school. I had twenty-five youngsters this morning."

"Twenty-five! Where did that many kids come from this time of year."

"They're up here on some kind of a winter Boy-Scout encampment. You'd be surprised how many young students I have during the winter season. Especially on weekends."

"They're lucky children," Lynn allowed, "getting to stay out of school and having a ski run of their own."

He laughed aloud. "You won't be the first beautiful lady to take a spill on their ski run."

"Gracious, Mr. Grunheit, you talk as though you expect me to fall down the first thing."

His inquiring eyes again swept her trim figure. He said

smoothly, "You look like you've got the balance of a figure skater." He paused, then added in a half-whisper, "And I bet you can dance like a gazelle."

She looked sharply in the other direction, momentarily annoyed with herself for giving him the opening, any opening, to make such a leading remark.

"But you won't have much reason to fall today. Because all we're going to learn in our first lesson is how to walk on skis. Besides, if you do start to go down, I'll grab you"—he slipped his arm around her waist and pulled her suddenly to his side—"like this!"

Completely taken aback by his brashness, Lynn pulled away from his grasp. She said with stiff politeness, "Is learning to stand up all we're going to do in an hour's lesson?"

He smiled engagingly, seemingly unaware that he had offended her. "Oh, no. Lesson number one also includes that you learn to call me Wolfgang. If you don't—then you see it wouldn't be proper for me to call you Lynn. And people who do not call each other by their first names can't get to know each other very—intimately, as I want to know you."

Her lips tightened. She was disgusted with his bold manner and utterly annoyed with herself for having engaged him for a teacher. But what else could she have done? Obviously he now noticed she was perturbed, for he sought to smooth over the situation by suddenly assuming the role of teacher. "Sit down over there and put on your skis," he said impersonally, pointing to a row of low weather-beaten benches to their left. "We will begin our lesson here, where the terrain is level."

Lynn was grateful he did not offer to help her put on her skis. She wanted nothing more than to get through the lesson without further personal complications. She was sure that if he made one more gesture, one more leading remark, she would abandon her skiing lessons immediately. She adjusted the bindings comfortably and remained seated while Wolfgang plunged into talk about the art of walking on skis.

"The first thing you must do is to become acquainted with the extension of your skis. You must also discover that your skis slide not only forward but backward." He paused to demonstrate what he meant by gracefully gliding his own body back and forth, back and forth, on the packed snow. "Like walking in shoes, walking on skis is a very natural movement, and to enjoy it and do your best you must be

relaxed at all times. Now watch, and I shall demonstrate more closely what I mean."

He did a graceful circle in front of her and then skidded to an abrupt stop. He began the forward walk. "The legs slide alternately forward," he explained, "and are helped by the push of your arms and the poles. Notice. Your skis are lined up parallel and fairly close together at all times. And your fists. Note they are near the body, for the power of the arms is transmitted to the poles more effectively in this manner. And be sure you put your hands in the loops of the pole handles the *right* way. They must fit snugly around the wrists. Like so." He stopped, swung into another large graceful circle, and then commanded, "Now on your feet! Let's see how good my student is at walking!"

Somehow Lynn managed to rise alone, and so overjoyed was she at her own accomplishment that she cried in glee, "Look, I can stand up!"

"Steady. Steady now," he warned. You haven't taken a step yet. Be confident—but not overconfident. Let the legs slide alternately forward."

Gingerly bracing herself with her ski poles, Lynn lifted one foot forward. A little feeling of exhilaration raced through her when it came down safely to the ground. She put the left foot forward and brought it, too, safely to anchor. Overwhelmed with joy, she cried out, "I've done it! And I *didn't* fall!"

Wolfgang rewarded her with lavish praise. "Splendid! Splendid! You are doing famously. I told you that you had great potential. Didn't I?"

The lesson progressed. For the most part Lynn sat on the bench at the top of Snowball Hill for the remainder of the hour, watching Wolfgang demonstrate, listening to him explain the steps over and over. And then came a practice period, which she survived with a few harmless spills. Each time she managed to scramble back to her feet unassisted. So satisfied was she with her own progress that she was almost ready to forgive Wolfgang for his flirtations and call it a perfect day. Then suddenly he surprised her by skiing rapidly toward her and coming to a dramatic stop directly in front of her. He stood towering above her, an enigmatic smile on his countenance. So surprised was she at his uninvited nearness that she suddenly felt dispossessed of her equilibrium. Feeling herself wabble on her skis and then begin to fall, she

groped the air for support and caught Wolfgang around his husky chest.

Instantly she realized he had taken her actions as a friendly gesture. For suddenly he swept her into his arms and smiling down into her face with a kind of finders-keepers glint in his eye, he said, "You darling little devil. Just try to get away from me now!"

She tugged for her freedom, cried angrily, "Let me go!"

His eyes snapped. "Not until you've kissed me."

"Turn me loose, or I'll bite you!"

He laughed delightedly at her fury. "Are you sure you want me to let you go? You might fall, you know."

No sooner had he spoken than he released her, and, as he had predicted, she went floundering toward the ground with the same crazy awkwardness as when she had fallen in front of the Blue Canyon Tavern. And as quickly as Steve Matson had leaped to her aid, Wolfgang was suddenly bending over her and offering to assist. "See? You cannot do without me."

"I'll thank you, Mr. Grunheit, to keep your hands off me," Lynn snapped indignantly.

He pretended to be offended and in his courtly way mourned, "You will not let me be the gentleman and help you?"

"I'll lie in the snow and freeze first," she said devoutly, struggling to loosen the bindings so she could get free of the skis and stand up before the last ounce of her dignity was destroyed. Once she was upright and brushing the snow from her ski pants, she muttered more to herself than to him, "This is a fine ending to a ski lesson."

"Surely, you are not put out about a little fall?" he said. "As I said, three or four lessons and you'll be gliding down that slope like a little champion."

"I'm afraid I won't be gliding down any slope if I have to depend on you as a teacher," she announced. "And the *next* time I engage a ski instructor he won't be some small-time Romeo like you."

Wolfgang looked at her as if she were a child throwing a temper tantrum. "Naughty, naughty," he scolded. "You throw your arms around me. You hug me. And then you say I am a wolf. Lynn, do you not think you should apologize?"

"*Apologize!*" she cried, gnashing her teeth. "*Me* apologize? Are you mad?" Her cheeks turned red with anger. She scooped up her skis and started marching toward the hotel.

Chapter IV

The following week began with a blizzard which turned the Sierra landscape into a white universe with no beginning, no end. It brought all skiing activities at the Tamarac to a dead stop and made it seem less than critical to Lynn that she was without a ski instructor. She wouldn't have been able to practice on the ski slopes even had she wanted to.

But she was fully aware that by dismissing Wolfgang she had put herself in an awkward position. What would she tell Mr. Radin? Inevitably, he would ask how she was progressing with her lessons. Certainly she couldn't just blurt out she didn't want to take any more lessons from Wolfgang. That would call for explanations. And if she told him exactly what had happened on the ski hill, he might conclude that she had said something, made some gesture to bring about such aggressive behavior on Wolfgang's part. And who was there to say differently? After all, Wolfgang was a long-time employee, and she was brand new. She decided that the less said about the matter, the better. There would be somebody else to give her some instruction when the weather cleared. Maybe Cedric.

Lynn regarded it as a blessing that, nightly, fresh snow fell and became so deep that even veteran skiers on some days abandoned the slopes to the elements. The danger of slides increased greatly, and it took constant plowing to keep the road open from the lodge to the main highway. The guests stayed huddled before the massive fireplace in the lobby, or crowded around a radio to hear the latest weather bulletins.

Finally came the forecast of clearing skies and rising tem-

peratures by the weekend. Had it not been for her dilemma over the ski lessons, Lynn would have been delighted with the prospect of the storm's end. Especially so because Steve Matson had telephoned to say he was coming to see her on Saturday. *I wonder if I'll still think he's so terribly nice,* she thought. And she readily concluded that she was certain she would.

While in progress, the blizzard had practically left her without any nursing duties to perform. She reported this to Mr. Radin one morning, and he told her not to be restless. "Just be glad nobody has a lot of aches and broken bones that you have to worry about," he said good-humoredly. "Enjoy the privileges of the hotel while you're not busy."

Lynn appreciated his generosity. But as one who had grown up in the sun-baked warmth of Southern California, she found it difficult to adjust herself to total indoor recreation. She was much more accustomed to swimming in the surf, playing tennis, riding a horse—to sitting on the bleachers at the Coliseum, watching the Dodgers play baseball.

The activity in the lobby indicated, however, that others did not take the hibernation with such reservation. It was a beehive of activity from breakfast time until midnight. Women knitted, played canasta and bridge, and viewed the soap operas on television. Although the men, especially the younger ones, gazed dreamily out at the winter skies, itching to be on their skis, they nonetheless adjusted to playing cards, checkers, and chess and engaging in long and heated debates on everything from international politics to the World Olympics.

But though the guests were temporarily consigned to the indoors, they did not completely give up the pleasant routine of a sportsmen's vacation. Each evening, just as if they had come in from an exhilarating day out of doors, they dressed in their end-of-the-day ski togs and gathered in intimite groups around the massive fireplace to sip cocktails and coffee. The men wore leather-trimmed corduroy pants and tartan shirts and fleece-lined after-ski boots. The women looked intriguing in velveteen tapered pants and bright-printed silk shirts. Some wore full tweed skirts and floral-embroidered knee socks. Pearl, Lynn reckoned, must have been doing a land office business in her beauty shop, for all the women were elegantly coiffured and manicured.

Lynn took advantage of her idle time and made an appointment to have her hair shaped and shampooed. It proved an interesting experience.

As Cedric had warned she would, Pearl made unsubtle efforts to wheedle bits of personal data from Lynn. But she must have quickly sensed that Lynn did not want to talk about herself, for she gossiped on about other employees and guests.

Before she had finished giving the second lathering, Pearl had brought Lynn up to date on Mrs. Strovel, the rich society woman from "Mass.—the one who's trying to marry her daughter off to the count. I don't have anything against rich people buying whatever they want," Pearl avowed, "but I say that true love's a commodity that's not for sale. Huh! Imagine anyone paying a couple hundred grand for someone with a title. And at that, one with a crooked nose and no castle."

"Counts seem to come high," Lynn commented, amused by Pearl's forthrightness.

"They're not worth it. I never did think much of foreign men. They're too fresh. Too crazy sure of themselves. We get a lot of them up here, too. American men are good enough for me."

"American men are my favorites, too," Lynn said, remembering ruefully her unpleasant encounter with Wolfgang.

Pearl sent a spray of tepid water over Lynn's scalp and spoke above the splatter. "You just ought to see some of the Hollywood gents who come up here skiing. Actors mostly. Now, they're the ones who really make a girl swoon. They're smooth as silk, and they've got a million dollars' worth of manners. Genuine manners, and not the kind that's put on. There's hardly a season goes by but some company doesn't shoot a movie around here. Sun Valley draws a lot of stars, too." Pearl paused, turned off the faucet. "But I guess Hollywood personalities are a dime a dozen down where you live. The streets must be cluttered with them."

"Oh, occasionally you see a star in some department store. Or maybe you recognize one driving down Wilshire Boulevard. And once in a while one comes to the hospital."

"Honest? It must be exciting. But I wouldn't know. I'm from Elka." Suddenly Pearl was sympathetic. "Gosh, honey, you must feel like a goldfish out of water working up in these hills. Away from all that drama in that big hospital."

She leaned toward Lynn, and asked confidentially, "Say, what's the idea of you taking this job, anyway? Are you saving your money for something? I know it pays well."

Lynn chuckled inwardly at Pearl's efforts to pry the personal information from her. Indirectly she answered, "Not all nurses work in hospitals. Some of them do private duty or public health nursing or—"

"Private duty. That's what Blanche Schofield's going to do back home," Pearl said. Then she paused. "What kind of a rinse will you have? Honey blond or golden glint?"

"Just vinegar."

Pearl returned to her discussion of Miss Schofield as she mixed the rinse. "That dear woman. It's a pity you didn't meet her. She's twenty-four-carat gold. Everybody thought so. Believe me, she didn't care what time of day it was or what the weather was. If she thought somebody needed her, out she'd go. And I don't mean just to treat some rich hotel guest who got bogged down in a snowdrift with a sprained ankle. Lots of people live around here in these mountains. They're tucked away in little canyons off the main road where nobody could find them unless they looked."

"How did Miss Schofield know they needed help?"

"There's the Ski Patrol and the highway officers and the men who do road work. They prowl around everywhere." Pearl laughed. "It's a wonder Radin didn't flip. The hotel paying Blanche that big salary, and her treating every Tom, Dick, and Harry in the community who had a stomach ache. Like I said, pure gold. But fifty's no time in a woman's life for her to be hopping around on skis in weather like this. I'll bet you don't have weather like this down south."

"Heavens, no. We have hardly any cold weather. The citrus crops would freeze."

"Southern California. Gad, that must be a paradise," Pearl mused, winding a towel around Lynn's head. "I've got some friends in San Berdoo—San Bernadino. Every weekend they go to Vegas to gamble or down to Diego to fish." She led Lynn to a booth. "Now to fix you up with a real nifty hairdo." Their eyes met in the mirror, and Pearl winked playfully. "Got a heavy date with some cute man tonight?"

Lynn shook her head. "No such luck."

"But I bet you're going to the dance Saturday night."

"My date isn't a nighttime date," Lynn explained. "It's just someone who's coming by the hotel for lunch on Saturday."

It was apparent that Pearl had it on the tip of her tongue to ask who the somebody was, but she said instead, "Maybe you can get him to stay over for the dance. They're swell dances. It's about the only time the women guests get out of stretch pants long enough to climb into party clothes."

"Are you going?" Lynn asked, wondering whether employees of the lodge were supposed to take part in such affairs.

"Sure I'm going," Pearl returned. "Radin always likes the girls who work here to go to the dances."

"Do you have a date?"

"With my steady," Pearl said, with the confidence of a woman who's romantic life is on an even keel. "He works for the highway patrol and has Saturday nights off. Sometimes, though, when the weather's good, we skip the dance and go to Reno to play a little roulette. How about you? Do you like to gamble a wee bit?"

"I never have."

"It's expensive, but fun," Pearl said, her baby-blue eyes twinkling naughtily. "Say, I want you to meet my beau—Buster Patterson. He's got something anybody who comes to Tamarac needs."

"What's that?"

"Ski insurance. He sells it on the side for the N.S.A. That's the National Ski Association. It's ten dollars a year for a policy and gives three hundred dollars' worth of medical care. You can't tell when even a good skier like you isn't going to need a little of that stuff."

"I'm not a good skier," Lynn confessed. "I can't ski at all."

Pearl's eyes bulged in disbelief. "You *can't* ski? Honey, how did you ever get this job when you don't know how to *ski?*"

"I'm going to learn," Lynn explained hastily. "I have to. I got the job under those conditions."

"Well, let me give you a tip. Learn from somebody else besides that Wolfgang Grunheit if you can. You know how those European men are. They're bold as brass."

"I know what you mean," Lynn said, exchanging a glance with Pearl in the mirror. "But you gave me the advice too late. I've already had a ski lesson from Mr. Grunheit. My first and *last.*"

Pearl frowned, viewed the matter from another perspective. "But I don't know who else you'd find to take

from. There's not another pro until you get to Squaw Valley."

"Maybe Cedric can teach me."

"Heavens, honey, not Cedric. He's saving his money to study choreography. He wouldn't dare take a chance on breaking any bones."

"Well, I'll find somebody."

"My customers might know of somebody close around. I'll keep my ears open."

Suddenly, Lynn gasped. For all her good intentions not to talk about herself, she had confided in Pearl!

Chapter V

Only one guest needed a nurse during the ensuing afternoon —a Mr. Todd Gilmore, identified by the maid who found him sprawled on the floor of his room as an heir to the Gilmore lumber fortune. Believing him dead, the maid ran frantically to the White Room. But Lynn, upon her arrival at Mr. Gilmore's room, found him very much alive but in a state of complete drunkenness. As always, it was revolting to her to be drawn into a drinking case, and she had to force herself to behave tolerantly as she and the maid dragged him onto the bed. Then, listening to his babblings about his lumber business, the way his relatives were trying to "thieve" him of his inheritance, the fact that life was not worth living, Lynn concluded he needed the help of an understanding psychiatrist far more than a nurse.

There being little she could do beyond ascertaining that he was not in need of her help, Lynn prescribed some lemon juice and honey to counteract the alcohol, a cold bath, and a good sleep. She called a bellhop to act as his orderly and promised Mr. Gilmore that when he sobered up, he would feel better able to face the world and its realities.

Before she left his room, he insisted she accept a fifty-dollar bill as a tip for her kindness. This, Lynn promptly refused. She quietly asked the bellboy to keep a check on Mr. Gilmore's room, warning that sometimes people in a state of such deep depression did rash things. Then she went back to the White Room, to finish the personal letters she had been writing.

One was to her mother, who, as usual, was wintering in Florida. The other was to Carmen Marie and her father in Los Angeles. It never ceased to be strange to Lynn that her real parents' stations in life were so markedly different. Her mother, who enjoyed the luxuries that made life easy; her father, poor and proud and plagued with an old back injury which sometimes made it impossible for him to work for months.

As Lynn sealed the letter to her father she wished that it had been ethical for her to accept the tip Mr. Gilmore had offered, so that she could have enclosed it. It would have paid some bills or bought some pretty school things for Triola. A new dress, a pair of patent leather shoes, ribbons for her shiny black hair. But in the Mexican district on Los Feliz Street where they lived, high-styled school dresses for teen-age girls weren't important. They weren't even in place. Most of the children were lucky if they had muslin clothes and sneakers without holes in the soles.

As always, when she thought of her father and Carmen Marie and little Triola living in the dark flat, a gloomy depression settled around her. Making an adequate living had always been a task for her dad. Almost from the hour he and Carmen Marie were married, their life had been plagued with financial hardship. For on their journey to the United States from Mexico City, where they had met and were married, they had been involved in a head-on automobile collision and her father had suffered a serious pelvic break which had left him with a permanent injury. But in the last few years his health had been more dependable, and he had been able to work with few interruptions at the big supermarket, where he was head of the green-vegetable department.

But before that there had been so many lean years when Carmen Marie worked as domestic help for a well-to-do family on Plumas Street. Even after Lynn had graduated and gone to work at her good salary, both Carmen Marie and her father had been stubborn about accepting any financial help. Only by camouflaging her contributions in the form of gifts had Lynn been able to add to their personal comforts.

But now! Wait until they heard about the deal she already had made for the lot in Fernando Acres, the modest

new suburb south of Los Angeles. A dozen times Lynn had framed in her mind the letter she planned to send as their wedding anniversary surprise later this month. And always she made certain that the letter would not sound like charity. It had been pure joy to be able to make the five-hundred-dollar advance payment to hold the lot. When spring came she would have an equal amount saved to add to the investment. That, with what Carmen Marie had been frugally saving toward a long-range private "house fund" of her own, would make enough for the total down payment. After all these years of dreaming, Carmen Marie was finally to have a home of her own.

It was noon on the following day, and Lynn was again seated at the kneehole desk in the White Room when the telephone rang. A husky voice said, "Hello, this is Steve."

Lynn somehow managed to keep the emotion from her voice. "Oh, yes, I remember you. You're the man who came for the Band-Aid."

He laughed. "I may need one after I go skiing. Or do we have time for a run down the slope before lunch?"

Skiing! "Oh—you didn't bring your skis all the way up here," she stalled, hoping she wouldn't have to confess again that she was a nonskier.

"I couldn't. I came over on snowshoes from the highway. But I can easily rent a pair." He paused. "Tell you what. We'll decide over a cup of coffee. Right?"

"All right. I'll meet you in the lobby in a few minutes."

She hung up the phone, quickly tidied her desk, and made a hasty appraisal of her appearance in her compact mirror. *Why couldn't I be a clerk in the hotel gift shop and be dressed in something chic instead of this antiseptic white?* She shrugged. *Well, I can't help it. He'll just have to take me looking like a hunk of white marble.*

But as they walked rapidly toward each other in the lobby, her misgivings were banished by the warm, approving smile he gave her.

Outwardly, their meeting was casusal. They laughed lightly, shook hands, and spoke of the improvement in the weather. Then they went into the snack bar and sat on the red-upholstered stools and ordered coffee. "After we drink our coffee I'll feel up to a few big jumps. How about you?"

She gave a little groan and confessed. "I'm sorry. I can't ski."

To her relief, he did not make anything of it. He returned, "Okay. Then we'll go on snowshoes."

"I can't snowshoe either."

"Sure you can. Anybody can. Just put one foot in front of the other."

It was as if she could already feel the swift cold wind blowing in her face, the exhilarating cold whipping against her parka. Maybe it was the knowledge that in a few minutes she and Steve would be alone in the great out of doors. She smiled across at him. "I'll hurry and get in my snow clothes."

Less than twenty minutes later, after Lynn had signed out at the desk, they were trudging over the snow, hand in hand. They had walked on the snowshoes a trial distance when Lynn cried with delight, "It's almost like walking on big tennis rackets. Maybe it doesn't have the fascination of skimming down a hill on two waxed planks, but it's safer. You don't know how I appreciate your suggesting this. You see, on my job I'm supposed to know how to ski." She paused, reflected on the stalemate in her ski lessons, and added, "I haven't had much time to learn yet."

"Well, no need for you to hurry now. You can go anyplace on snowshoes. Who knows? Maybe you'll start a fad."

"Hardly, when you think that many of the guests travel hundreds of miles on a weekend just to get in a few hours' skiing." She stopped, lifted her hand, and waved at the couple who passed overhead on the ski lift. "Doesn't that look like fun."

"Now, if you were a skier, we'd be up in one of those buckets." He clasped her mittened hand and steered her with the bend in the trail toward the north. They walked a long time, away from the hotel, the other skiers. They were alone, walled in by the wild solitude of the winter and the mountains and the snow-cloaked pines. On and on they tramped, to the music of the crunchy snow beneath their snowshoes. The only other sounds they heard were the distant *halloo, halloo,* of one skier calling to another.

"Can you just walk off your job any time like this?" Steve asked.

"Yes and no. As long as I check in and out with the desk clerk so he knows where I am."

"They'd have a hard time finding you now if they needed you. We're far off the beaten trail."

"They won't need me," she said, disdaining to think about nursing duties while alone with Steve in this white wilderness.

They walked silently along in the snow, and then Steve spoke again. "For a city girl who rides taxis, you must be getting tired."

"No. I could walk till dark."

"They would sure miss you at the hotel by then."

"I doubt it. Besides, it wouldn't matter. My boss is awfully lenient."

"You wouldn't think so," Steve returned, "if you'd heard him giving that bellhop the devil for being late."

"Mr. Radin's firm all right, but he's a nice boss. Really, the Tamarac is a wonderful place to work."

He smiled at her enthusiasm. "You sure like your job, don't you?"

"I couldn't like it better. Everybody who works there seems to feel the same way."

"College kids sure think these hotel jobs are pretty big stuff. They can take a semester off and catch up on their skiing and earn a little money at the same time."

"Cedric Pinkus, one of the desk clerks, is saving his money to study choreography."

"What's that? Dancing?"

"Planning the dances for ballets."

He grinned. "You'll think I'm not very much up on the arts—"

He stopped, grabbed Lynn's arm to steady her as she began to flounder. "You nearly fell."

She caught her breath. "I must have hit a clump or something. I did almost fall."

"Now see, if you had been on those hickory planks, you'd be face-down in the snow. Maybe with a broken leg."

"Goodness, you're cheerful."

"I ought to know. I tramp around on this rough terrain enough on my job. You get—" He stopped, stood silent, his body tense and alert, staring at something to their left.

A little awed, Lynn asked, "Do—do you see something?"

His tone was hushed. "Maybe. Wait here."

Her heartbeat quickened as she watched him slough, surefooted and as quiet as a rabbit, through the loose snow. At

a snow-draped bush about thirty feet from her he stopped and bent suddenly to his knees. He half turned, called over his shoulder: "Come here, Lynn!"

"What is it?"

"A man . . ."

Chapter VI

Lynn awkwardly maneuvered her snowshoes toward the spot where Steve knelt on the ground.

"Hurry!" he snapped. "Walk faster."

"I can't walk any faster," she answered, her feet sinking into the snow with each step. Anxiously, she wondered if the man was dead. Certainly he would be if he had been lying in the snow very long. But when she finally bent over him on the cold ground, slipped off her mitten, and felt for the faint hammer of his pulse, she found he was alive. He was lying on his side, and when she leaned across him to lift his eyelids, she made a surprising discovery.

The man was Todd Gilmore—the rich young lumberman who had been so intoxicated in his room yesterday.

Steve glanced at Lynn. "Is he dead?"

"No. But he'll freeze if we don't get him out of here quick. Let's carry him back to the lodge."

"What! Pack him on our shoulders?"

"But, Steve! He'll freeze if we don't." She shook the man vigorously. "Mr. Gilmore, wake up! Try to wake up!"

"You know him?"

"He's a guest at the hotel. I had him for a patient yesterday. Oh, please! Let's pick him up and carry him back to the hotel. There's nothing we can do for him here."

"Don't be absurd, Lynn," Steve said sharply. "We've come a long distance—perhaps too far. There's only one thing we can do. You stay here and see that he doesn't freeze. I'll go for a stretcher."

A strange apprehensivenesss stirred beneath her wool

parka. She didn't particularly favor being left alone in the frozen wilderness. "I wish you weren't so stubborn," she advanced. "We at least could try to carry him."

"We're wasting time talking," he snapped, ripping off his windbreaker and spreading it out on the snow. "Here. Let's lift him onto this. It will provide a little warmth."

She swallowed hard and obeyed. She searched Steve's eyes to see if there was any chance he would change his mind about leaving them behind. But they were as sharp and set as the tip of a ski pole. Regardlessly, she made one last try to convince him. "I know! We could make a pack saddle and carry him. Didn't you ever do that when you were a kid?"

Steve inquired in a not very gentle voice, "What are you afraid of? Freezing or bears?"

Chagrined by his challenge, she tilted her chin and announced, "I'll thank you to know I'm no coward."

"Then here," he admonished, tossing her the sweater he had worn beneath the windbreaker. "Wrap both your faces in this to keep them from getting frozen."

She stood holding it, watching him as he stood there in only his ski pants and the top of his bright red long-sleeved underwear. She wanted to shout at him to take his sweater back, that he needed it more than she or the man did. But you didn't give orders to Steve Matson.

"I'm off," he said tersely. He sent a mad, hot thrill through her whole body when he bent down and brushed her lips with a swift kiss. "Be a big brave girl."

She watched him until he became a lonely spot on the snow. Then she turned away and crumpled, shivering, to her knees beside Mr. Gilmore and cradled his face in Steve's sweater. Again she felt his pulse. It was still there, but his face was like the mask of death. She tried to rouse him. "Mr. Gilmore! Mr. Gilmore! Can you hear me?"

He did not stir. "Mr. Gilmore!" she said again. "Are you awake? Can you hear me talking to you?"

Still there was no sign of consciousness. Lynn again lifted his eyelids and looked at the pupils to see if there was any enlargement. There was not. She wondered if she should search farther for trouble signs, but the acute cold and his bulky clothing discouraged it. She would have to wait. Her eyes scanned the lonely white mountainside. Her thoughts flew to Steve. She speculated dismally whether it might start to snow before he got back with help. How far had they

come together? Would he lose his way and be unable to find her? She even wondered if a bear might come along. Suddenly, she thought of half a dozen things she should have told him before he left. To be sure to call for a doctor to come to the lodge . . . to bring her nurse's kit . . . to check the contents for—

Mr. Gilmore stirred. Then, suddenly, he spoke: "Where am I?"

"You're all right," said Lynn gently. "You're not alone. I'm here with you."

His eyes, now opened wide, were wild and glassy. "Who—who are you?"

"I'm the nurse at the hotel, Mr. Gilmore," she said quietly. "Can you move?"

He made no effort to try, and sank back into a stupor. She wondered if he were slowly freezing or if something else was causing his unconsciousness. She tried to remember how long it took to freeze to death, but she couldn't. And she wondered how long it had been since he had fallen in the snow. She massaged his hands in an attempt to restore the circulation, and then, gently, she bent forward and lay her chest over his to give him some of her body warmth.

Perhaps it was this gesture which caused him to again rouse. "Where am I?" he cried a second time.

"You're all right, Mr. Gilmore. Help is coming soon. We'll take you back to the hotel where it's warm."

He groaned. "Oh Lord! Why is anybody coming to get me?"

"They're coming to help you. You've been in an accident."

His voice lifted emotionally. "Tell them not to come after me. Tell them—tell everybody I want to die."

Lynn gasped. Was the man delirious, or—she remembered his depression yesterday—was it a case of attempted suicide?

Steve, hurry, hurry, she wished fervently . . .

He arrived, finally, with a party of rescuers. Steve anxiously hovered over Lynn to make sure she was all right as the others lifted Mr. Gilmore onto a stretcher. Then, as the caravan proceeded over the snow, Steve, who was walking beside Lynn and holding hard to her cold hand, said, "I wouldn't have been surprised to find you both had turned to Eskimo Pies!"

"Don't be too sure I haven't turned into an icicle," she answered in a frozen voice. "My poor feet are numb."

"You should have let us pack you in on a stretcher, too."

"That's ridiculous," she scoffed. Then she gave a little laugh, "Besides, I need all the practice I can get on my snowshoes."

There were moments, however, in the long trek back when her numb feet begged to stay glued to the snow, and she had to force them forward. Then Steve, who seemed to know her feelings, would say in a firm voice, "Don't bog down now." "We're almost there." "Think how good a hot cup of coffee is going to taste."

She doubted if a gallon of coffee could ever melt the cold inside her. But she did not forget to remind him, "Have you forgotten you invited me to lunch?"

"So I did," he said, pretending to remember suddenly.

"Don't try to crawl out of the invitation. I'm starved, even though I am half-frozen." She paused. "Oh, Steve, I wish I'd told you to get a doctor."

"Don't worry about the doctor. He's on his way up now from Colfax."

"Dr. Fritchy?"

"Somebody your boss called. He's bringing his portable X-ray equipment along."

"Maybe he won't need it."

He shot her a curious glance. "Why? Don't you think he's got any broken bones?"

She frowned. "It could be he's just suffering from frostbite and snow blindness. Exposure, of course."

"And fear of being chewed up by a mountain lion."

She disregarded his quip. "Steve, I'm not so sure he had an accident."

"Oh, I see!" he bantered. "You think he just got tired and lay down in the snow to take a nap."

Suddenly she was speaking in a whisper as if fearful that Mr. Gilmore might hear what she was going to say. "Yes. That's exactly what I think. You know they say freezing to death is a very easy way to die. And I think Mr. Gilmore wanted to die—to commit suicide."

"What!"

"I do. I think he purposely lay down out there to die."

"Well, little Miss Perry Mason," he accused laughingly, "it's a good thing we're getting back to the hotel, or you'd be concocting up a murder instead of a suicide."

He seemed so thoroughly incredulous of her theory that she didn't bother to tell him what Mr. Gilmore had said during his few brief moments of consciousness.

Dr. Fritchy, who arrived not long after Mr. Gilmore had been put in one of the cots in the White Room, also was reluctant to give any credence to Lynn's theory that Mr. Gilmore might have been an attempted suicide. He checked the man's irrational remarks off to delirium brought on by overexposure. And especially so after Mr. Gilmore himself, under the mellowing influence of the warm fire, gave a detailed account of how he had fallen into the snow and, believing he had a broken leg, had been unable to help himself. Although Dr. Fritchy found no bone fractures, he did discover the patient was suffering from advanced frostbite and that there was a possibility two or three fingers might have to be amputated. Arrangements were made to have him moved immediately to the hospital in Reno.

"Couldn't we do the surgery here, Doctor?" Lynn asked.

"I've done lots more extensive things than cut off a few fingers here," he rejected. "But his kind is better off in a hospital with a high-priced room and a couple of private nurses. He wouldn't think I'd be taking proper care of him if I didn't give him all the trimmings. His folks have been around this country operating lumber mills for fifteen, twenty years. Never thought this young man had much knack for the lumber business, though. Never seemed to get along very well with the family."

"I didn't realize you knew him."

"Oh, I don't know him personally. Just what I read in the papers. Seems the family is having a lot of litigation over the property holdings." Dr. Fritchy looked at his watch. "Well, I'd better be making it back down the grade if I'm going to be there to deliver Sarah Banning's baby. It's due any time now. She's had enough of them to do it herself, but she'd be awfully peeved if I wasn't there."

At their belated lunch, which Lynn and Steve finally got around to eating at four o'clock, she purposely did not press her suspicion that Todd Gilmore had attempted suicide. And in the busy days that followed, even her own convictions weakened. The reports from the Reno hospital, where Mr. Gilmore was to be a patient for some time following the

amputation of three fingers and two toes, were encouraging. And there already was talk of his returning to the hotel for the remainder of his convalescence.

Steve, to Lynn's delight, came often to the Tamarac to see her. Sometimes as often as every other day. On one of his visits after the Gilmore incident, when he'd come for a swim with her in the inside pool, he indicated he had a change of heart regarding the matter of her learning to ski. And as an added persuasion he reminded her of her obligation to her job and her promise to Mr. Radin. As though she needed any reminder! It was a matter that had been plaguing her from the moment she had impetuously dismissed Wolfgang.

She and Steve were sitting on the edge of the pool, dangling their feet in the heated water, as Steve enlarged on the issue: "Snowshoeing is good up to a point, but sometimes it takes skis to get where you're going."

"You're right," she acknowledged dutifully. "I must get around to taking some lessons." Again she declined to explain the situation with Wolfgang. Steve might think she did or said something to cause his behavior.

"It's like golf," Steve went on. "You've got to take lessons to ever learn. But don't keep putting them off, or you'll never get started."

"But once I get started, I'll sail right along," she said jokingly.

"Don't get overconfident," he warned, "before you've had your first spill. Skiing's not as simple as learning to square dance."

She laughed. "I'll bet it's not as hard as learning the cha-cha."

"Take some lessons—and you'll find out. Grunheit, right here at the hotel, is a good instructor."

"Isn't there anyone else?"

"Don't be so choosy. He's coached champions."

She said, "Oh," and then added, "Well, I might begin tomorrow."

She was far from pleased with the prospect of taking lessons from Wolfgang. But she realized there was nothing to do but pocket her pride and again sign up with him. Only this time she did not engage him for private lessons; she enrolled in the class for children from eight to twelve which was held at eleven every morning on Snowball Hill—the kindergarten ski slope. Being no taller than some of the boys,

Lynn speculated she might be taken for one of them and go unnoticed. She hoped especially that would be the case if Mr. Radin happened out on the trail when she was there. He would be utterly disgusted when he discovered what little progress she had made.

Wolfgang's method of instruction with the children, Lynn found, was much more enlightening than the private lesson she had taken. First, because there were no distractions—no cozy innuendoes, no excuses for him to slip a wandering arm around her waist or try to steal a kiss. Here, the fun-and-games method of learning the fundamentals of skiing, though agonizingly slow was employed with good results. After several lessons on the walking step, in which they practiced long forward strides and correct use of the poles to get the best glide and rhythm into their movements, they moved on to the sidestep—the surest way to get uphill. A few lessons later they had progressed to the point where they could leave the well-manicured slopes of Snowball Hill and step off-trail to the unpacked snow.

Steve, who was watching Lynn's slow progress with some doubts, suggested that she might make more headway if she got out of the youngsters' class and took some real lessons. He told her so, very pointedly, one Wednesday night when he came over for the weekly square-dance jamboree and they sat talking in front of the big stone fireplace in the cardroom. "Fooling around with a bunch of kids is absolutely no way to learn to ski."

"It's the best way," she contradicted, again vetoing the impulse to mention Wolfgang's amorous advances. "I wouldn't doubt a lot of Olympic champions learned that way."

He said, "Bosh!" and gave her a very disparaging look.

"Oh well, I'm not planning on being an Olympic champion, anyway."

"It's a good thing. You wouldn't be good enough for twenty or thirty years at the gait you're learning."

She laughed. "Just so I learn well enough to please Mr. Radin. And I will. The instructor does a lot of demonstrating. I'm like a kid—I learn fastest by imitation."

Their conversation was interrupted when Pearl and her highway patrolman fiance, Buster Patterson, stopped to chat.

"Don't think Buster and I came over to sell you any ski insurance," Pearl said, apologizing for the intrusion as she sank down into one of the big leather chairs.

Steve laughed. "Maybe you'd better write out a policy for Lynn. She's a good prospect—now that she's taking ski lessons."

Pearl's nose for news tilted inquisitively. "You are, Lynn? Who from?"

"Mr. Grunheit."

"In the kids' class," Steve filled in.

"Yikes!" Buster sang. "Maybe you really should let me write you up with a policy. No fooling. Anybody who seriously takes up skiing takes her life in her hands."

"Buster, hush," Pearl implored. "You'll scare Lynn out of taking lessons. And if she wants to keep her job, she's got to learn."

Steve said dryly, "That ought to be incentive enough to take real lessons."

"Yeah," Buster agreed. "Even if they do cost like heck, they're worth anybody's time and money. You can crack your skull mighty easily for not knowing how to manipulate a pair of skis."

Obviously Pearl sensed from Lynn's distressed expression that the conversation was a touchy one, for she quickly channeled the talk in another direction. "Say, has anybody heard the rumor about that new hotel they're going to build on the Nevada line?"

"Rumor!" Buster exclaimed. "Pearl, you know it's not just talk. They've already issued the building permit. Brother, is it going to be a whopper! The main gaming room is going to be as big as a roller-skating rink."

Pearl looked disconsolate. "Big is right," she brooded. "It's so big it's going to make the Tamarac look like a hen house. They say it's going to have two thousand rooms, inside tennis courts, swimming pools, gambling rooms, and—" she paused dramatically—"a beauty salon."

"Now, Pearl," Buster said devotedly, "the competition from that beauty shop isn't going to interfere any with your trade. You've got a reputation that nobody can touch. People drive as far as thirty miles to have you give them a permanent."

"Honey," Pearl said gloomily to her fiance, "my reputation for giving a good permanent just can't compete with sitting under the dryer and playing the slot machine at the same time."

"That's pretty stiff competition," Steve had to agree.

"Speaking of gambling casinos, I hear the Pair-O-Dice is changing hands."

"There's been a deal on for that for six months," Pearl reported. "They say the fellow who's interested in buying it doesn't know a bingo blower from a pair of loaded dice. But I guess you don't need gambling talent to buy a casino. Just money."

"Who has that kind of money?" Steve inquired.

"I don't know who he is," Pearl was forced to admit.

"Don't tell me there's something around here you don't know," chided Buster.

"I'll find out. I'll ask Mrs. Strovel when she comes for her manicure tomorrow. She'll know."

Buster turned to Steve, to rib him about his roads. "You fellows sure better step it up on these highways, or nobody will be able to crack the traffic to get to the hotel."

"Keep your shirt on, Officer," Steve tossed back. "We'll have them done down to the white lines and the road markers by the time the Olympics get here."

"You'd better. The highway patrol's predicting a record-breaking crowd."

"Naturally," Pearl advanced. "Why wouldn't everybody want to come? It's the first time in history the Winter Games have been held in America."

Lynn interposed, "I read in the paper yesterday a television network had bought the exclusive rights to telecast them."

"It'll be just like a Hollywood *premiere*," Pearl concluded, with her usual zest for fanfare.

"And that's not all," Buster said. "They're also going to televise the Walt Disney opening and closing ceremonies. Brother! Am I glad I'm assigned to this beat." The strains of a square-dance tune filtered in over the loudspeaker. His eyes wandered to Pearl. "Come on, honey, let's dance it."

After they had gone Steve and Lynn sat in front of the lazy fire, watching the flame-etched pictures it made, listening to the mellow folk-song music, not talking much. She wondered if he liked being there half as much as she did. If he didn't, he surely looked [illegible] big

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"What's chilly in Southern California? Sixty degrees?"

"Forty. But it doesn't get that cold often."

"No wonder you never learned to ski."

"I can water ski," she bragged. "Like lightning."

"You're lucky they didn't hire some girl who lives around here for your job. One who could ski."

She gave him an impish smile. "Aren't you glad they didn't?"

"I guess so," he returned, crossing his long arms behind his head and staring into the fire. "It's sort of nice having a crazy little somebody to sit in front of the fire with."

"Thanks," she told him, quivering with joy.

When he spoke again, his voice held an inquiring note. "But you wouldn't like being away from the bright lights and your family all the time, would you?"

"Well, I didn't come to the mountains to stay forever," she allowed. "I've got certain ties at home, of course."

He asked pointedly, "Why don't you ever talk about your family?"

"With so many people around I don't seem to have much time to."

"I'm a pretty busy guy, too, but I found time a long time ago to tell you about my folks."

"I loved hearing about your sisters. It must be wonderful having *four*."

He grimaced. "It's awful," he said, "when you're the only male."

She laughed. "You poor pampered darling. If I had a brother, I'd have adored him."

"Any sisters?"

"A little half-sister." She paused. "My parents are divorced."

"Are they? You hadn't ever mentioned it."

She knew he was pressing her to tell him about herself and her family, and suddenly she wanted to. She wanted him to know all about her, about everything that had shaped her and made her the way she was. Slowly, quietly, she began:

"I was seven when it happened. The divorce I mean. At the time I didn't really comprehend what was happening except that suddenly my life was cluttered up with arguments and weeping and insecurity."

"I see you survived it even if it was a little rough," Steve

for
les-

Who from?" inquisitively. "You are, Lynn?

"Mr. Grunheit."

"In the kids' class," Steve filled in.

"Yikes!" Buster sang. "Maybe you really should let me write you up with a policy. No fooling. Anybody who seriously takes up skiing takes her life in her hands."

"Buster, hush," Pearl implored. "You'll scare Lynn out of taking lessons. And if she wants to keep her job, she's got to learn."

Steve said dryly, "That ought to be incentive enough to take real lessons."

"Yeah," Buster agreed. "Even if they do cost like heck, they're worth anybody's time and money. You can crack your skull mighty easily for not knowing how to manipulate a pair of skis."

Obviously Pearl sensed from Lynn's distressed expression that the conversation was a touchy one, for she quickly channeled the talk in another direction. "Say, has anybody heard the rumor about that new hotel they're going to build on the Nevada line?"

"Rumor!" Buster exclaimed. "Pearl, you know it's not just talk. They've already issued the building permit. Brother, is it going to be a whopper! The main gaming room is going to be as big as a roller-skating rink."

Pearl looked disconsolate. "Big is right," she brooded. "It's so big it's going to make the Tamarac look like a hen house. They say it's going to have two thousand rooms, inside tennis courts, swimming pools, gambling rooms, and—" she paused dramatically—"a beauty salon."

"Now, Pearl," Buster said devotedly, "the competition from that beauty shop isn't going to interfere any with your trade. You've got a reputation that nobody can touch. People drive as far as thirty miles to have you give them a permanent."

"Honey," Pearl said gloomily to her fiance, "my reputation for giving a good permanent just can't compete with sitting under the dryer and playing the slot machine at the same time."

"That's pretty stiff competition," Steve had to agree.

remarked casually, as if purposely dissuading her from any self-pity.

"At times it was very rough. Marital inharmony spells unhappiness for everyone concerned. In my case it went on until I was eighteen and old enough to escape it by going in nurse's training."

"Well, is that anything to be bitter about now?" he contended. "You're not hurt."

"Maybe I'm not. But remember, Steve, a growing girl is a very touchy piece of equipment. Unpleasant things leave their scars. All my life I'll remember my mother and dad wrangling and arguing and making spiteful accusations against each other."

"Did it matter to you which one you lived with?"

"I wanted it just the way the judge ordered," she confided, looking away from his eyes and into the fire. "I wanted to live an equal time with both of them. And the whole thing could have been very congenial if they hadn't kept up a running battle over me."

He had to admit that there was adequate room for dissension on her part, but he stoutly claimed that probably none of it was as bad as she painted it. "Look at you at the ripe old age of twenty-one. As stable as one of those Douglas firs on the hillside."

She half smiled and agreed that probably she had weathered the storm with less wear than she perhaps thought. "My stepmother is really responsible for my keeping my feet on the ground and not holding any grudges. She doesn't know the meaning of pettiness or ill-will."

Steve inquired, "Is she human?"

"She's the kindliest, gentlest woman I've ever known. You'd love her, Steve. She's Spanish and has such a vibrant personality. And she's so devoted to her family. She loves me just like she loves Triola, my half-sister—her own daughter."

"Triola? Now, that's an unusual name."

"Spanish people have very colorful names. Triola wants to be a nurse, too."

"H-m-m-m. Now I see your finger in the pie."

"No you don't. I wouldn't think of influencing her," Lynn insisted seriously. "But today almost every girl at some time or another thinks she wants to go into nursing. She feels it's a

way to do something constructive—something within her reach. The uniform and the cap—what they stand for—sway them."

In the reflection of the little orange flames in the fire he caught her eye. "They sway me, too," he said softly. "Just being with you does all kinds of cockeyed, wonderful things to me."

Her eyes danced like the flames; her heart pounded. "Steve Matson! The way you talk . . ."

Chapter VII

The day that Todd Gilmore returned to the Tamarac was the day Mr. Radin discovered Lynn had not yet conquered the rudiments of skiing. He was coming from an inspection of one of the slaloms when he passed Snowball Hill, and unluckily, Lynn took that exact moment to slip and fall in the loose snow. She was on her back, both her skis sticking straight up in the air, when Mr. Radin stepped up beside her. He stared incredulously, then bellowed, "Miss Ryan! What a surprise to find you *here*."

By his emphasis on "here," Lynn knew he was showing his chagrin at finding her on the children's ski run. It took her considerable time to unravel herself, scramble to her feet, and gain her voice. "I—"

But before she could utter another syllable, Mr. Radin interrupted. "I thought by this time you would be able to ski quite proficiently. And here I discover you haven't even learned to stand up."

"But—you see, I *am* learning, Mr. Radin."

He pointed to the trail from which he had just come. "Yes, I've been watching you from up there. And I must say, I was quite amazed. It seems to me that with all the available time your job allows, you should be able to stand on your feet by now. What if an emergency comes up on one of the ski trails? How would you expect to get there? Fly?"

Lynn was thoroughly squelched by his crushing remarks. But she managed to say, "I can walk on snowshoes."

"Snowshoes!" he retorted. "A snail's way to travel. And there are places snowshoes can't get you to."

She was going to remind him she had gone on snowshoes to aid Todd Gilmore, but he didn't give her the chance to speak.

"Miss Schofield was an expert skier," he projected, "and she was past fifty."

"Miss Schofield could do anything," Lynn admitted, giving her predecessor due credit. "But I'll learn. Mr. Grunheit says I'll be able to ski very soon."

Wolfgang, who had been standing nearby overhearing the conversation, confirmed her prediction: "Indeed she will. Miss Ryan is as agile as a leopard. She shows remarkable aptitude."

Lynn was willing to forgive Wolfgang completely for his past infractions in view of his present staunch loyalty. She was relieved when Mr. Radin swung abruptly and stalked off down the snow trail in the direction of the lodge, obviously very angry. Lynn turned to Wolfgang. "Thanks," she said quietly.

"*Ach!* Radin has the manner of a lamb," he avowed, "but the claws of a cougar. I should punch him in the pouch for upsetting you. Of all my students, you are the most sensitive, the most—"

She interrupted him to make a hasty departure before he carried his solicitude any further.

Later that same afternoon, when Lynn answered a request to go to the suite of Mr. Gilmore—one of the de luxe suites —Mr. Radin's scalding reprimand still depressed her. She always brooded over any unpleasant human relationship.

But if Mr. Radin had forgotten her successful snowshoe adventure, Mr. Gilmore had not. He was full of praise: "If you hadn't gotten there when you did, I'd have lost more than three fingers and two toes," he acclaimed solemnly, holding up the bandaged hand. He offered her a chair. "Yes, Miss Ryan, if you hadn't found me, I'd have lost my life—and that's for sure."

"You're very kind to say so," she said, wondering as she sat how she could have suspected anyone with the zest he now displayed of having suicidal tendencies. Lounging in a big chair in a good-looking corduroy sports jacket, his feet propped comfortably on an ottoman, he hardly seemed like the same man she had encountered before. "You're doing very nicely following the amputations," she complimented.

"A few weeks' rest, and I'll be a new man and off crutches."

"I'm sure of it," she said.

When he spoke again, she noticed a trace of the old uncertainty in his voice. "It's going to be nice to know there's a trained nurse around—somebody to give me a boost when I get to feeling depressed and sorry for myself."

"If people keep busy," Lynn said, "they don't have much time to think about themselves."

"Perhaps." He looked boldly into her eyes. "You were very brave, Miss Ryan. You didn't have to stay there with me until help came."

"That's all over now. You'll have to begin thinking about more important things now that you're getting well."

His tone lifted. "I've got a lot to think about these days. Or has the word gotten around the hotel yet that I'm the owner of the Pair-O-Dice—just over the state line in Nevada?"

"The big gambling casino?"

"Don't look so surprised, Miss Ryan." He smiled. "Don't you know gambling is a legitimate business in Nevada? I consider the casino a very sound way to invest a little inheritance I came into recently. You know, money has a way of slipping out of your hands if—well, if you don't put it in a safe place where others can't touch it."

Lynn recalled what he had said before about relatives trying to swindle him. Again she wondered if these fears were real. Perfunctorily she said, "I hope your investment turns out successful."

"I'm new at such things," he acknowledged, "but I hope to give it everything I've got. It's a fascinating business, although taxes and license fees to the state do cut into the profits."

Lynn replied that she knew very little about it. "In California we don't have gambling."

"No? Well, what do you call pari-mutuel betting on horse races? Or the poker parlors in Southern California?"

She chuckled. "I wouldn't know about that."

"Well, gambling's gambling. But in Nevada, somehow, it is different. Maybe because it's as much a part of the state as sagebrush. Back in the gold- and silver-rush days—when Tonopah and Goldfield were in their heyday—gambling was wide open. And it still is. Only, then it was in the backrooms of the saloons, and now it's carried on in the big hotels

with plush surroundings." His eyes brightened. "When you see the Pair-O-Dice, you'll see what I mean."

"It's a rather catchy name."

He leaned back in his chair and gazed out the window. "Anything connected with gambling gets in your blood. Once you've tasted it, it's something you never get out of your system."

"Even when you've got a lot of pressing lumber-company affairs?" she prodded.

He shrugged. "My brothers handle most of those." He squared his shoulders. "But they won't have a finger in the Pair-O-Dice. It's mine. It's something they can't take away from me."

Again Lynn sensed in his voice a deep-rooted animosity toward certain family relationships. "You seem very proud of your casino," she stated for the want of something more pertinent to say.

"I am. When I get off these crutches, we'll drive over together to see it."

Following her meeting with Mr. Gilmore, Lynn developed a wild curiosity to see the inside of a gaming house. Woman-like, she planned a campaign to get Steve to take her. On Monday when he arrived early for the weekly square-dancing party, she said, with a good deal of feminine finesse, "It would be nice to see some bright lights for a change."

"Where are there any bright lights in these hills?"

"Oh—up around the state line."

"You mean at the casinos? Hey, don't you know those one-arm bandits are for idiots?"

"And what—is a one-arm bandit?"

"A slot machine that takes absolutely no brains to operate. All you need is a pocketful of coins, and you raise your arm and pull the lever."

"O-oh, sounds like fun—even if it is just for idiots." She smiled her most enticing smile. "S-Steve, wouldn't it be nice to dress up and go up to the Pair-O-Dice? And tonight is Monday, my night off. I would only have to sign out at the desk."

He seemed appalled at her suggestion. "You mean go up there and lose your bankroll?"

"Not my bankroll. Just five dollars or something little like that. That's what Pearl says people do. They take a certain amount with them, and when it's gone, they stop playing.

They figure they've had a lot of fun. And doesn't everybody have to pay for entertainment?"

Steve sighed painfully. "Well, if you're that anxious to throw away your hard-earned money, I'll drive you over and watch you do it. But don't say I didn't warn you."

"Oh, you're a darling. I'll run up and get my coat, and we can leave right now." She gave a light laugh and added, "For the den of iniquity."

On the ride through the night-cloaked mountains, Lynn told Steve that Todd Gilmore was the new owner of the Pair-O-Dice casino.

Steve's tone was a little acid. "Huh, to think we risked our necks the other day to save a member of the gambling syndicate."

"You make it sound as though we should have let him freeze," Lynn chided. "Besides, I'm sure he's not tied up with the big-time professional gamblers."

"Well, he's certainly not in the business for his health."

"I think it's just a toy."

"A pretty expensive toy, I'd say," Steve commented as they drove into sight of the big and garishly lighted casino. "Look at that electric sign. I'll bet it would take three years of my salary to pay for it."

Lynn admitted he probably was right. She glanced up the highway at other resorts clustered in the area, each with a gaudy sign which blinked on and off. "I guess each one figures it has to have a bigger and brighter sign than the others to attract the customers."

"The victims," he amended.

She laughed softly. "I do believe you're incurably anti-gambling."

"Not necessarily." He slowed down the pace of the car as it came into the section where gaudy establishments lined both sides of the highway. "But it always seemed to me they're out of place up here among the mountains and along the shore of the lake."

"It does seem funny that they're crowded together in one block like this."

It was Steve's turn to chuckle. "I see, young lady, you've got a lot to learn about the psychology of gambling. Many's the casino that has gone broke the first month when the owners got exclusive and built off to themselves. Gamblers are like birds. They flock together. They like their gambling

joints all built in one little square block so they can go from one to the other losing their money without wearing out their shoes."

"You'd think nobody ever won, to hear you talk."

"Nobody does. What happens? You win a few dollars and then play it back trying to win more—and wind up broke."

"Pooh! I'll bet every once in a while somebody wins a huge fortune."

"That's only in the movies," Steve explained drolly.

When they stepped through the Pair-O-Dice entrance, as inviting as wide-open church doors, Lynn was unprepared for the surroundings which greeted her eyes. The sound of clicking chips, rolling dice, and spinning slots was like a mysterious melody. The enormous room was walled with dark wood paneling, scrolled and buffed to a dull, satiny luster. Glittering chandeliers, hung with what seemed to be thousands of crystal prisms, twinkled in the high ceiling. Large framed paintings—some, themes of the desert, others, portraits—hung against the mellow wood. Underfoot, a blood-red carpet muffled the footsteps of the hundreds of guests. Some stood at the batteries of slot machines which occupied the area just inside the door. As their arms went rhythmically through the motions of pulling the lever, their eyes transfixed on the revolving wheels, the players appeared to be in a trance. Several played two machines at once. Occasionally, the clink of coins falling into the cup rang out like a golden-voiced bell. And when one lucky customer hit the jackpot, a gong sounded as for a three-alarm fire—a brazen ballyhoo to offset the dull clinks of the machines when they did not pay.

Steve took Lynn's arm and steered her toward the rear of the casino, her feet seeming to sink inches into the plush carpet. How different was everything here from anything she had ever seen before. She could think of only two words to describe it. Fantastic. Fabulous. To her left a roulette wheel spun joyously, and Lynn's eyes opened in amazement at the craftsmanship of the table with its inlaid designs of silver and mother-of-pearl. "Look!" she squealed with open curiosity. "What are they playing at that table?"

"Faro. But that's not for you, baby."

"I never heard of it," she answered with blank naivete. She pointed to another green-felt-covered table. "What are they playing at that table?"

"Bingo."

"Well, I know how to play bingo. They play that at the Southern California Fair—on the midway."

"Not Nevada-style," he amended. "You'd better stick to the slot machines to go broke. It's more for beginners."

"You're so certain I'll go broke."

He invited her to find out for herself. "Give me your five dollars," he ordered. "I'll get it changed into silver for you. What do you want to play? The nickel, dime, or quarter machine."

"The nickel. Then I can play longer."

Lynn watched as Steve stepped to the wire cash cage. When he stepped back, he handed her the paper rolls of coins with the admonition "Don't bet it all on one horse."

She dropped her fortune into her purse. "Oh, no. I'm only planning on unwrapping one roll of nickels at a time."

The fascination of pulling the lever was even more exciting than she had dreamed. And when the first clatter of winning coins came tumbling down into the cup, she yelped with delight. "Steve, look! I won."

He smiled, genuinely pleased at her victory, but nonetheless glumly warned, "Beginner's luck. You'll lose it back in ten minutes."

Obviously, luck was running with her, for although she lost a part of her profit, she quickly recouped it and was in possession of three dollars over her original capital.

"You're the one who said nobody ever won," she gloated. "If I keep on playing, I can double my winnings."

"Oh no you don't," he said, taking her arm and leading her away from the machine. "Quit while you're ahead. Besides, we have a long way to drive back to the lodge."

Chapter VIII

Lynn awakened the next morning to the sound of the swift wind blowing through the pine-studded canyon, to the scent of Douglas fir and damp snow and clean mountain air—and to the sweet memory of the things Steve had said to her on their way back from the Pair-O-Dice.

Sweet, unforgettable things. Things he had not before said in the two wonderful months they had known each other. A warm glow of happiness swept through her as she remembered his hard, hot lips on hers as they'd stood alone in the midnight shadows of the portico and he'd told her good night. He had set her heart afire when he whispered, "I love you, Lynn. I love you, darling."

Her whole being had been aflame as she watched him walk through the snow to his car, and then her eyes had followed the two red tail-lights until they disappeared around a bend in the road.

Lying there listening to the chatter of two snowbirds on her window sill, Lynn suddenly found herself wondering if Steve had really meant all those things. Did he still feel the same way this morning? Or had it been the carnival spirit, the gay, mad little community of hotels and casinos at the state line, with all their bright lights and their artificiality?

Pondering it, her mind went back to a dozen conversations she had heard in the nurses' lounge at the hospital in Los Angeles. Talk of disappointments and heartbreaks that had been reaped from passing courtships.

Thinking of the girls at Memorial and the heavy routine

duties and responsibilities she had shared with them, Lynn felt a moment of guilt for the inactivity of her job here at the Tamarac. Some days she felt as if she were on an endless vacation as she waited around the White Room for a call to come. Most of the guests were young and healthy, with few ailments. Some of the middle-aged visitors had chronic aches but actually needed nothing but sympathy.

One day she had reported this to Mr. Radin, and his reply was something of a barb. "Perhaps you could use the time to spend several hours a day practicing your skiing, Miss Ryan."

She was glad now that she could report she had been practicing and progressing rapidly. He seemed kinder about the situation in view of her earnest efforts and took the opportunity to compliment her on what he termed her good work and her efficient attitude in the White Room. "Like I said, seeing a nurse around in her white uniform gives our guests a feeling of security."

Grateful for his assurances that she was handling her professional duties satisfactorily, she thanked him warmly. Too, it made her feel far more comfortable about drawing the generous salary for the amount of work she was doing. The savings she was accumulating from the job would mean so much to her father and Carmen Marie.

It was on their wedding anniversary some time ago that Lynn had told them about the five-hundred-dollar down payment she had made on the lot for them. In a letter overflowing with thanks, Carmen Marie had tried to express her joy: "Now that you have put five hundred dollars down on the property, nothing must stop your father and me from getting the money together for the next payment." Then, in her determined, practical way she had added, "And nothing will! Otherwise we should lose your wonderful, wonderful gift."

And now, with the savings she was able to put aside, Lynn foresaw that she would have enough by the following spring to send them five hundred dollars toward the amount of the second payment. She toyed with the idea of holding back this good news so that it would come as a big surprise to them in the spring. But it was news much too good to keep, so she had given away her secret in her next letter. And she was glad she had when she received Carmen Marie's reply:

"I cannot think up American words to tell you how grateful we are. *Gracias! Gracias!* We would like to say to you

we do not need your money. But it is not true. We would never be able to get such a great amount of money together ourselves. You can never know how much this means to us and how much we thank you. God bless you, my girl."

Ironically, when she read this letter, Lynn thought how Mr. Gilmore had the money to buy a lavish lakefront casino and operate it with the assistance of several secretaries during his convalescence. Only there was one very decided difference. An important one. Todd Gilmore inherited his money. She was earning hers.

When Lynn met Mr. Gilmore later in the lobby, she thought again that he was a man who had been born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Invariably when he saw her, he struck up a conversation. Today he insisted they have something to drink. "I don't dare offer you a cocktail while you're wearing your white uniform. But how about a cup of tea?"

Lynn did not really want a cup of tea, but she accepted. Mr. Gilmore, for all his youth and attractiveness and money, always seemed a lonely person. Across a table in the buffet lounge he inquired, "How did you like the Pair-O-Dice?"

Surprised, she asked, "How did you know I was there?"

He glanced down at his manicure. "Guess."

"Pearl Paulson told you."

He nodded affirmatively. "She said you won."

"Three dollars."

"Well, I suppose three dollars is three dollars," he said, smiling. "For someone who has an aversion to gambling as you do, I would guess you probably played the five-cent slots."

"You guess right."

"Well, even if you had won the jackpot playing that machine, you couldn't have won a fortune. Ten dollars at the most."

"I didn't win the jackpot," she assured him.

"It wouldn't have been astounding if you had. The slots at the Pair-O-Dice are not fixed. And just between us, the honest odds are good enough so the house can do all right, believe me."

Lynn reckoned that every casino owner, unless he was an out-and-out crook, would claim his establishment gave the customers the best break. In any event she concluded that if she ever went gaming again, she'd return to the Pair-O-Dice.

After the waitress had brought their tea, Lynn mentioned to Mr. Gilmore that even if she had lost three dollars, she

would have thought it a good investment. Just seeing the elaborate casino for the first time and observing the people had been an education—and a very pleasant one.

Mr. Gilmore, who asked her at this point to "please drop the Mister and call me Todd," explained it wasn't necessary for guests to gamble when they went to the Pair-O-Dice. They were always welcome just to drop in and watch, whether they spent money or not.

Lynn made a mental note to mention this to Pearl. Perhaps they could drive over some Monday afternoon, on her day off, and take a sight-seeing tour through the casino. It would be lots of fun, going with Pearl.

Lynn saw Pearl the next afternoon. But it was not an occasion for discussing frivolities such as gambling. Pearl came to the White Room in a state of considerable excitement.

"Thank heaven you're in your office," the beauty operator groaned, relieved.

"And doing nothing," Lynn told her.

"Well, here's something. It's a favor for Buster. There's a little old lady real sick up in her mountain cabin, and he's got to get help to her. Can you go?"

Lynn hesitated, weighing what Mr. Radin might say if she was gone too long in the middle of the afternoon. When she did not answer immediately, Pearl pressed: "Gosh, honey, Miss Schofield never said no when Buster asked a favor. You can't let this old lady down."

Pearl's challenge spurred Lynn to reply quickly. "Surely. Of course I'll go, Pearl." But Lynn wondered why Buster had not attempted to get a doctor if the woman was so ill. Even her public health rating did not give her a license to diagnose people's ills.

Pearl's voice was marked with appreciation. "You're simply wonderful, honey. Buster's in the coffee shop. I'll go tell him you're available."

"I'll be in the lobby in five minutes."

Lynn opened her nursing kit to take a last-minute inventory of its contents. Surely anything she would need for emergency treatment was there. Sterile syringes and some needles, bandages, applicators, adhesive tape. Some digitalis and codeine. A stethoscope. Then she drew on her galoshes over her white oxfords and insulated herself with a bulky wool sweater before she slipped into her parka. In the lobby she stepped to the desk and told Cedric where she was going,

what time she'd probably be back, but that she could not be reached there.

In the patrol car bound east on the county road that turned off the main highway, Lynn saw that her estimate of her time away from the lodge was seriously inaccurate. It was not snowing, but travel was slow, and Buster informed her they still had twelve miles to travel. In another half-hour, when they got to a fork in the road, he made the startling announcement "Well this is the end of the line. It's snowshoes from here on in."

"But I haven't any snowshoes."

"Yes, you have. I brought you a pair." He grinned. "I thought if I told you ahead of time how rough it was going to be, you might change your mind and not come. I used to have to trick Schofield the same way. But finally her old joints got so tight, I felt sorry and wouldn't ask her to come out in the weather."

Buster pulled the snowshoes from the trunk and bent down to fasten them to Lynn's feet.

"Wouldn't skis be faster?" she asked. "Or do you have any extras?"

"I thought Pearl said you hadn't learned to manipulate the hickories yet."

"I have learned," Lynn stated with immense pride. "Yesterday I had to ski clear down to the bottom of the far slalom to treat a woman with a dislocated kneecap."

"Gosh, wonder if she's one of my policyholders," Buster said. "Here, give me your other hoof and let's get you into these snowshoes. Too bad I didn't bring skis."

"What are you?" Lynn inquired. "A Good Samaritan to all the sick people in the mountains?"

"Looking for highway violators isn't all there is to my job. Up here in this rough country you snoop around and run into all sorts of things." He rose, offered to pull her to her feet. "Think you can walk a quarter of a mile in those tennis rackets?"

"You can carry me piggy-back if I can't," she tossed back.

A short time later, when they approached the small mountain cabin, with its tiny gabled roof and miniature chimney, Lynn's first thought was that it was a doll house frosted in white icing. A tiny spiral of blue smoke rose from the chimney. Icicles hung from the eaves and window sills, and

the soft, amber glow of the light within gave it a fairy-tale appearance.

Buster said, "An old couple named Perry live here. They really ought to move down to town where they would be near help when they need it. But old folks are stubborn. They don't like to be moved out of their nest."

"So you take it upon yourself," Lynn said, "to look in on them every little while and see that they're all right."

"Occasionally," he confessed. "Once in a while I bring by some fresh milk or some chocolate bars."

It was a good thing, Lynn soon realized, that Buster had the hunch and the kindness to check on the Perrys this week. As soon as she saw Mrs. Perry, a frail and elderly woman, she knew she was desperately ill.

Mr. Perry sought to explain. "Mama's not near as sick as she was last night. She most near died then." He glanced lovingly at the slight figure lying on the ancient iron bed. "But you're feelin' a heap better today, aren't you, Mama?"

Mrs. Perry tried to be brave for her husband's sake. "A little better, Papa."

Guided by their remarks, Lynn laid her hand in the area of Mrs. Perry's appendix. She pressed gently. "Do you feel any pain there, Mrs. Perry?"

The woman winced visibly. "It's—it's tender. But not near as touchy as it was last night."

Lynn took her temperature. It was dangerously high. Quickly, after more questions, she weighed the symptoms: the lower abdominal pains, the extreme nausea, the important fact the pain had subsided since last night.

"Did you take a laxative?" she asked.

"No, miss," Mr. Perry said, answering the question for his wife. "We ain't much for them laxatives they advertise on the radio." He looked inquiringly at Lynn. "What do you think's wrong with her?"

"I'm no doctor, Mr. Perry," Lynn explained, "so I can't make a diagnosis. But I think we should take a blood specimen and have it sent to a doctor for analysis. Then he can tell what's wrong."

Mr. Perry stroked his wife's forehead. "See, Mama," he said encouragingly, "the nurse says it ain't nothin' much." Then he offered to take the specimen down to the doctor—if he could hop a ride in the patrol car.

"Nothing of the sort," Lynn said quickly. "You and I will stay with Mrs. Perry while the patrolman goes."

Lynn walked out alone to the living room, where Buster was waiting, and handed him the glass vial of blood. In a hushed voice she said, "Look, we've got trouble in there. A lot of trouble. Take this to Dr. Fritchy and tell him to run a blood count immediately. I think she's got a ruptured appendix."

"A ruptured appendix—at her age! I thought they shriveled up like tonsils when people got old."

"Sh-h. And don't be sure they always shrivel up. If I'm right, Dr. Fritchy will order an ambulance and move her immediately to the hospital so he can operate—before it's too late."

"Lynn, you can't move her!"

"We can if we have to. She's a sturdy little mountain lady. We'll wrap her in blankets, put her on a bobsled, and take her down to the road to the ambulance."

Buster shook his head. "We'll kill her sure if we take her out in this cold weather on a bobsled."

"She'll die if we don't. Listen, don't waste any more time. Get this specimen to Dr. Fritchy and get back here with his orders."

Buster slid the vial carefully into his breast pocket. "Don't look for me back for an hour and a half—or more. Colfax is thirty miles from here—and the roads are slippery as butter."

"Well, blow your siren and clear the road," Lynn said practically. "This is an emergency."

Buster's estimate on the time was not far off. He did not arrive back with a bobsled, however, but with a snowplow which cut a path for the ambulance right to the Perrys' front door. While the stewards prepared Mrs. Perry for the journey to the hospital, Buster took Lynn aside.

"The doc will be at the hospital," he explained. "He's going to operate as soon as she gets there."

"What did he say?" she inquired anxiously. "Does he think it's ruptured?"

His voice was solemn. "Yeah."

Lynn's countenance remained unmoved. She turned, gave Mrs. Perry one last glance before the stewards maneuvered the stretcher toward the ambulance. Side by side, she and Buster stood in the open doorway of the quaint little cottage

and watched the vehicle proceed slowly down the hill. From force of habit she glanced at her watch.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed. "I've been gone from the lodge more than three hours!"

Buster double checked the time with his watch. "Murder, Lynn! I hope Radin isn't hopping mad because you've been away so long."

She was to find out soon enough.

It was Cedric, still on duty at the desk when she returned, who broke the news to her that Mr. Radin was furious because she had left without leaving word on where she could be reached.

"Did he need me? Was somebody—"

"Indeed there was somebody ill," said Cedric. "A child threw a fit in the dining room. Everybody was trying to find you. I'm sorry, Lynn, but I had to tell the boss you had left the hotel some time earlier. I hope—"

Lynn didn't wait for Cedric to finish his explanation. "Where's the child now?"

"Upstairs, in his room."

"Was there anybody to help him?"

"His mother got a bellboy to carry him upstairs. She wasn't nearly as upset about him as Mr. Radin was."

Lynn thought instantly of the possibility of epilepsy, of which the mother would undoubtedly be aware. She queried Cedric, "Did you see the child have the convulsion?"

"Lord, Lynn, everybody in the dining room did. All of a sudden he let out a loud yell. Everybody stopped eating and looked at him. The next second he was lying on the floor, his head drawn back and over to one side. His fists were clenched, and his feet were sticking straight up in the air."

"Was this followed by a muscular contraction?"

"Well, I wouldn't know that," Cedric said. "But his breathing got real heavy, and his face turned brick red. That's when his mother called for the bellboy to carry him upstairs. When they couldn't find you, Mr. Radin got as upset as I've ever seen him."

Somehow Mr. Radin's anger didn't seem so important now that Lynn felt sure that the mother had been able to handle the situation without her. After all, what she had been doing was important, too. She might have saved a woman's life.

She quietly thanked Cedric for filling her in, then made a call on the boy's mother. The young woman, Mrs.

O'Brien, though grateful for Lynn's interest, explained it did not matter an iota that she had not been available. The seizures, she said, were a common occurrence with her son, and she knew exactly what to do for him. Her regret was that one had occurred in the dining room.

Lynn said that that fact was unimportant and attempted to comfort her by reminding her that the youngster would remember nothing of the incident. She promised to pay a call on him the following day when he was awake.

"That would be wonderful," Mrs. O'Brien said. "Sometimes children like Johnny feel so rejected when they're plagued with a horrible disease like this. I tell you, nurse, parents don't know how lucky they are when they have healthy children."

With that, Lynn could agree readily.

Chapter IX

In her box at the clerk's desk when she came on duty the following morning Lynn found a letter from Florida, one from Los Angeles, and an interoffice memorandum from Mr. Radin.

Mr. Radin suggested she come to his office immediately. The summons was not unexpected, but the thought of the reprimand she knew was in store left her with a cold uneasiness. And suddenly she was not so sure her absence from the hotel would not result in permanent damage to her status as the RN at the Tamarac. And she was even less sure of it a few minutes later when she faced the hotel manager across his oversized desk.

She cringed inwardly at the cold, cutting sarcasm in his voice when he said, "Well, Miss Ryan, it appears the patients at our hotel go unattended while you're out doing field duty for the highway patrol."

Lynn sank into the chair opposite him, feeling completely unarmed. She had to force her voice to be steady. "I—I didn't expect to be gone nearly so long, Mr. Radin. You see—"

"I'm sure I do see. When the highway patrol blows its siren, you're off to assist them. Well, has it ever occurred to you that the state can well afford to provide whatever services it needs? And have you forgotten that the management of this hotel is the one that pays your salary as a full-time nurse?" He leaned back in his massive swivel chair, fingered his mustache, and remarked, "I think, Miss Ryan, you will agree we are quite generous to our employees. You're given frequent

privileges. But those do not include the liberty to go off without telling us how you can be reached."

Lynn was rent by mingled emotions. From his perspective, Mr. Radin was right, and when he put it that way, she had no ready defense. But did this man have no compassion except for paying guests at his hotel? Did he not temper his criticism with some little consideration for poor Mrs. Perry who had lain dying? Now, when she spoke, she was less on the defensive. "I'm sorry, of course, about the incident. But not so much came from it—since nothing untoward happened at the hotel in my absence."

"Nothing happened!" he fairly bellowed. "Don't tell me you didn't even *hear* what happened?"

"About the boy? Yes, I heard."

"And you say nothing happened?"

"He's subject to frequent epilepsy attacks. Even had I been here, I couldn't have prevented his having one in the dining room. And his mother is well schooled on how to take care of him."

His eyes snapped. "That doesn't excuse us from our responsibility. We advertise that we offer the services of a nurse to our guests as a part of the accommodations." He glanced down at the sheaf of papers on his desk, indicating he was ready to bring their conversation to a close. "Be careful, Miss Ryan, that there is no similar occurrence in the future."

"Yes, sir, I shall," Lynn said, relieved that the interview was over. "Good morning, Mr. Radin."

"Good morning."

Over a delayed breakfast for which she had absolutely no appetite, Lynn read the letters that had come in the morning post. Her mother's she read first, but it lifted her only slightly from her depression. It was full of the usual talk of where she and Lynn's stepfather had been, shows they had seen, and bits about the restaurant business. At present her stepfather was taking a long look at Florida with an eye toward opening a restaurant in Jacksonville. If he decided to do so, it probably would mean they would move to Florida, and then Lynn would have to come and spend some time there. The surf was wonderful, and there simply was no place in all the world like Miami Beach. She was mailing Lynn a sapphire blue wool dress that should be perfect for social affairs during the Olympics. She hoped she liked it.

A little pang of regret tugged at Lynn when she thought of how few of the small but important things in life she and her mother shared. With her it was always things like pretty fashions, stimulating business projects, and people in her own social strata. She so seldom showed any interest in Lynn's life, even in her nursing activities.

Carmen Marie's letter, which she read next, was devoid of talk of successful and exciting business ventures. It was a sad letter, but even in the face of several unexpected circumstances that had arisen, it was nonetheless full of hope. After she had written at great length about Triola and her high school freshman activities, she came to the troublesome part:

"Now I will tell you about your father. He is not the one to work in the supermarket. His spine is not straight like the road to heaven. He should be the one to grow vegetables in the sunshine and not sell them in the store. In the supermarket he must move the big box of lettuce and carrots, and again he has hurt his back and he cannot work. But you must not think the worst, my girl. We will spend only a mite from our savings to meet our needs until your father can return to work. To spend more would take away from our fund to make the payment on the house in Fernando Acres. And if we did not have the down payment by spring, your first gift of the five hundred dollars would be lost. But I warn you again, do not think the worst will happen. Only good comes to people if they turn their back to the belief that the world is full of unhappiness and sorrow. . . ."

Carmen Marie's simple courage tugged fiercely at Lynn's heart. Quickly she refolded the letter and stuffed it back into the envelope. Even if she were starving, Carmen Marie would still be able to see the rainbow. She would refuse to believe that anything that ever happened wasn't for the best.

Looking up, Lynn saw Pearl coming into the dining room. In her wrinkleless cosmetologists' uniform and her bleached blond hair she looked something like a buttercup with a yellow center. Lynn waved her over.

Pearl, as usual, was a bundle of cheer. "Just *wait* till I give you an M.D. bulletin on little Mrs. Perry," she greeted Lynn as she slipped into the vacant seat at the snack-bar counter.

"Did you hear something?"

"Buster just called. He said he was down at the hospital to check on her, and Dr. Fritchy says she's surprising everybody

how well she came through the operation. And he said barring complications she'll be fine."

"That's miraculous," Lynn said, "for a woman her age. But then, she's an awfully wiry little thing."

"And she's probably got a terrific will to live. Buster says she and Mr. Perry are silly about each other—even at their ages." Pearl glanced at the menu. "Now that I've brought you such good news, maybe you'll quit looking so down in the mouth yourself." She paused. "What's the matter? It's nothing to do with Steve, I hope."

Unaware that she had been wearing her feelings on her sleeve, Lynn responded, "Of course it has nothing to do with Steve."

"Well, I knew he didn't think much of you gambling the other night."

"Pearl Paulson! Is there anything that happens around this hotel you don't know about?"

Pearl winked. "Anything that happens anyplace in Squaw Valley," she amended. "Of course, I don't pick up too much gossip from the gaming houses. Most of my clientele are sports people."

The way Pearl said "gaming houses" sent a sudden, unexpected thought through Lynn's mind. "Gaming houses" sounded so much more discreet than "gambling casinos." It had a lady-like ring. "P-earl," Lynn said softly, "how much do you know about gambling?"

"Me? Not much more than any amateur. Just what I see when Buster and I run over to Reno occasionally." She squinted inquiringly. "Why?"

"How do you think I'd do playing roulette?"

"Well, if you're thinking about trying to win a nice little nest egg, roulette's a lot better than the slots. The trouble with slot machines is you never win much. One of those nickel machines only pays seven or ten dollars. Of course, the dime machines pay twenty, and if you've got the nerve to play with silver dollars—well, the sky's the limit. You can win a real pile for yourself."

"I suppose," Lynn projected, "that even though I've never played roulette, I could learn."

"Sure, I don't know why not. Or bingo's a good game to win with. One of my customers last week paid me out of a hundred-dollar bill she said she won at Harrah's Club playing bingo."

Stories of such wealth so easily come by sent the wheels spinning again in Lynn's brain. What if she tried playing bingo just once or twice a month and won just fifty dollars each time? She'd be able to accumulate enough by spring to help make up the deficit in Carmen Marie's savings account. Lynn looked Pearl straight in the eye. "Don't tell anyone, but let's you and me go over to the Pair-O-Dice on my night off. Would you?"

Pearl winked. "That would be fun. When is your night off?"

"Monday. I wouldn't dare leave the hotel any other time—after what happened yesterday."

"Heavens no! Radin would have a litter."

"Well, be sure and don't tell anyone we're going," Lynn warned.

"You can trust me." Pearl chuckled. "Wouldn't Steve have cats, too, if he knew?"

Monday night, Lynn and Pearl slipped unobtrusively from the hotel around to the kitchen entrance. There they met Wong Duck, the Chinese cook whose arm Lynn had treated her first days at the Tamarac and whom they had bribed to drive them to the Pair-O-Dice in his delivery truck. The girls rode beside him in the cab and talked of things alien to gambling. But not Wong, who compared American gambling to thievery and openly said so. Fantan, Chinese lotteries, and other games of his honorable ancestors, yes. But not slot machines and roulette and throwing dice. "To risk your money on these," he put it, "was like throwing dry leaves into the wind."

Indeed, had not Pearl bribed him with a bottle of Sport King hair tonic, which he used liberally, he probably would not have consented to drive them to the Pair-O-Dice. Lynn's share of the bribery was to treat him to three alleys of bowling at the big bowl a quarter of a mile from the casino area. When Wong Duck alighted from the rattly truck at a filling station for air for the tires, Lynn and Pearl had their first opportunity to discuss their plans for the evening.

"I only brought an X," Pearl confided, her way of alluding to a ten-dollar bill. "When that's gone, I'm through."

Lynn was less forthright. "I'm not sure what I may end up spending." Already she was beginning to feel a little conscience-stricken for having suggested the trip. If Pearl lost,

she'd probably feel in some measure responsible. And if Steve found out she had even come—well, that was something she'd rather not think about at the moment.

"They say," Pearl stated philosophically, "that if you win, you should put your winnings in an envelope and mail them to yourself at home. In that way you keep from playing them back—and probably losing everything. Do you think you'd have the nerve to gamble more than ten dollars?"

Again Lynn was evasive. "I guess I'll just wait and see how my luck is running," she said. But she thought, *If I'm going to make enough to do Dad and Carmen Marie any good, I'll have to risk a lot. . . .*

Minutes later, when Wong Duck brought his truck to a halt at the main entrance of the Pair-O-Dice, Lynn had the feeling of stepping from a car at Hollywood and Vine. The lights were that brilliant. But after Wong Duck drove off, she was seized with the feeling of being very much alone. "Are we allowed in without escorts?" she asked Pearl, half hoping she would say no.

Pearl pointed to the throngs of well-dressed women lined up at the slot machines, pulling levers back and forth. "You don't think all these have a date, do you? Most of them probably have husbands at home sleeping so they can get up early and go skiing."

Lynn recalled that she had seen an unusually large number of women alone the time she and Steve had come here. And she had noticed, also, that they had an air of poise and confidence in the way they stepped right up to the slot machines and began playing. But Lynn had a very strong hunch that when she stepped up to one of the slot machines, she'd be taken immediately as an amateur. And more so if she ever walked up to one of the roulette tables and asked to be included in the game. She was glad that Pearl took the initiative and led the way through the brilliantly lighted room toward the game tables. A girl in a western cowgirl dress and hat stopped to ask them if she could make change. Pearl handed her ten dollars and asked for "all nickels." The change-maker fished into the large pocket of her apron and pulled out ten rolls of nickels in paper wrappers.

Lynn asked for ten rolls, too.

"Good luck," the girl said, and began looking around for somebody else who needed change.

The presence of the female money-changers and the fe-

male dealers behind the gaming tables somehow seemed to lend an air of respectability to the establishment—also the feeling one was not trafficking with hardened professionals. But Lynn was quick to shed any illusions. The women dealers, dressed in pink satin blouses, full quilted black skirts, all had sharp, knowing eyes which seemed to take in everything at their tables at a single glance.

The suspense which hung like a fog cloud over the casino seemed to engulf Lynn as she stepped up to one of the slot machines. Cautiously, almost miserly at first, she began dropping in her nickels. Suddenly she too was immersed in the little game of pulling the lever, watching for the symbols that flickered on and off, with the drop of every coin. She was surprised, too, and thrilled at the number of return nickels that dropped into the cup. Her confidence was buoyed immeasurably.

Perhaps that was what gave her the courage to step over to the roulette table. Knowing nothing whatever about how to play the game, she politely asked the dealer to instruct her on the rules. The girl graciously accommodated her. But Lynn must have left her luck at the slot machine. For in less than an hour, her holdings—the precious two hundred hard-saved dollars she had brought with her in the hope of parlaying it into bigger stakes—had dwindled to a mere five dollars.

The ride back to the Tamarac in Wong Duck's truck was a long and dismal pilgrimage. Lynn's misery was complete when Pearl confessed that she, too, was broke.

But what really hurt Lynn was what she had done to Carmen Marie!

Chapter X

Usually, the arrival of the Pacific Ski Special each Saturday morning at the Squaw Valley station, bringing to the Tamarac its share of eager, fun-seeking sports people, was the signal for a weekend of gaiety and excitement. But today the laughter and high spirits of the incoming guests served only to accentuate the desolation in Lynn's heart. How could she feel like laughing after an evening as ill-fated as the one at the Pair-O-Dice?

She would have chosen to bury herself and her misery behind the walls of the White Room. But Mr. Radin had requested her to be in evidence in the lobby when the shuttle bus brought the new guests over from the station. "If there are any amateurs in the bunch," he had explained, "your white uniform will be a bracer for them. Beginners are always afraid of breaking their necks or a leg a way off from any help."

The way Lynn felt, she wondered how her appearance could lend assurance to anyone. In her frame of mind she might even tend to make them think some disaster was at hand. Nonetheless, she had dressed carefully in a clean uniform, and wearing a white wool bulky sweater over it against the early morning chill, she stood waiting in full view of the new arrivals as the first busload tumbled into the lobby. From the amount of luggage, skis, and gear that followed, it was readily evident that the slaloms would see a good deal of activity during the weekend. When people came from long distances to reach the slopes, they skied

madly during their short stay, to justify the expense and effort of the trip.

Lynn managed to freeze a pleasant expression on her face and nodded a welcome to the guests as they passed her and sidled their way through the lobby. Another day, Lynn would have shown a natural feminine interest in the smart sports clothes worn by the women. Today, nothing was of any importance except the devastating remorse in her heart and the realization that she had corrupted her plan to help her family.

The little house in Fernando Acres seemed very far away. And the irony was that only last week she had written Carmen Marie about her intention to help and to beg her not to worry about having to dip into their savings during the temporary unemployment of her father.

Never could she admit to her father or Carmen Marie her folly. Her spirits lifted slightly when she thought that somehow she would make up the deficit. Two hundred dollars was not a fortune. But in this case, with the unexpected expenses at home, the two hundred dollars could well spell the difference between their meeting and not meeting the spring deadline.

Nor, Lynn decided, could she tell Steve of her foolishness. He would never forgive her. Inwardly, she was almost relieved that she would not see him until next Monday, when he would come to drive her to Squaw Valley. They were going up to see the new dormitories for the athletes that were now finished and opened for viewing by the public. A week would give her time to gain back some of her lost self-esteem. And perhaps think of a way to make up the deficit.

Lynn's eyes scanned the lobby and fell on the mound of ski gear piled high in front of the elevator. The soft organ music—a skating waltz that was being piped into the lobby—the continuous purr of lighthearted voices, lent the illusion of a stage setting to the massive room.

The elevator door slid open, and Todd Gilmore emerged into the lobby. Lynn gasped in surprise at seeing him walking without his crutches. He saw her almost at once, waved, and, hobbling slightly, walked straight in her direction. He looked very attractive in his modish hopsacking sports coat and olive-colored slacks. Suddenly he stood triumphantly in front of her and, like a small boy begging for a compliment, asked, "How is this for walking on three toes?"

"I couldn't believe it was you. And you're wearing shoes!"

"Sandals," he amended. "They're not healed enough yet for leather." He glanced toward the dining room. "Won't you have breakfast with me?"

"I had breakfast an hour ago, thank you." She wondered how she could have ever thought that anyone so gracious and at ease could possibly have needed psychiatric treatment. She turned slightly and gazed out the massive plate-glass window at another busload of people arriving. "The hotel comes to life very early when the Ski Special arrives."

Todd Gilmore's eyes followed hers through the window to the ice-skating pond just beyond. A couple, whom Lynn recognized as the Olympic team known informally as Kay and Karl, were gracefully gliding over the ice. Abruptly he said, "I'm devilishly sorry you lost so much at the Pair-O-Dice."

She gasped. "Do you know *everything* that happens in your gambling casino?"

He smiled. "When I'm there, which has only been very recently, I usually keep an eye on my friends. I have a window in my office that looks down on the main floor." He paused, then spoke low. "It would have been impossible not to see you. It must be the way you smile or the way you wear your hair—something. Something that makes you stand out from the crowd."

She gasped inwardly at his display of flattery. It was the first time he had talked to her like that. She returned, in a casual, half-facetious way, "Oh, I see. You spy on your customers. You see who wins and loses, Mr. Gilmore."

"Todd," he corrected, and pretended to scold her. "And you violated the first rule of gambling, Lynn, when you came to the Pair-O-Dice."

"Me? How?"

"Never gamble more than you can afford to lose."

"What makes you think I did?"

"From the anxious expression on your face."

"I didn't know I was so obvious."

"Everyone is." He paused a second and leaned against the window casing. "Next time, Lynn, don't go with Pearl. Go with me. I wouldn't let you play too long. I'd make you stop while you were still ahead."

"There won't be a next time," she avowed firmly.

"Everybody says that—when they lose. But they never mean it. They always come back."

"I suppose that's what makes gambling profitable for casino owners."

"For some, yes," he admitted. His voice grew strangely confidential. "What if I told you I wasn't in the gambling business to make money? Would you believe that?"

"Why is anyone in business if they don't want to make money?"

"There are other reasons," he said flatly, again letting his eye drift outside to the couple skating on the ice. He stood silently watching them as they did a daring maneuver in which the girl's head came so close to the ice that her hair brushed it. Then he went on speaking: "Wouldn't the urge to stand on your own feet and do something independent of anybody else be one good reason?"

"I—I suppose so," she answered.

Then his voice took on a note of militance. "You see, Lynn, I have some older brothers who have run roughshod over me since I was a kid. They still do. When my father died and left the lumber business to us, they, being older, became big shots in the company. I always remained the kid brother, taking orders from them. It hurt me so bad, sometimes I didn't even want to go on living."

Although surprised at his frankness, Lynn was not astonished by his ill-feelings toward members of his family; he had mentioned them before. Wishing to say the right thing she replied, "Every person, even if he is a younger brother, has the privilege to assert his rights."

"You don't assert your rights with brothers like mine." Suddenly his eyes brightened. "But from the minute I bought the Pair-O-Dice things have been different. They can't run over me there. It's one thing they don't have any control over. It's mine. All mine."

Wolfgang was waiting in the White Room when Lynn arrived after helping greet the newcomers on the Ski Special. He said he had a raging headache and needed aspirin. But it couldn't have been a very bad headache, Lynn decided, for he asked her if she wanted to ski out with him on Huckleberry Hill, where some of his students were practicing.

Quick as she was to decline, it nonetheless was nice to know he thought her capable of skiing on such a steep slalom. She blamed her refusal on her job: "I have to keep office hours some of the time."

"Radin doesn't care what you do as long as it's in the interest of the guests," he argued.

"I dare say your expert jumpers aren't going to need a nurse today." She paused, looked toward the sudden rustling that came from the doorway.

"*Ach!*" Wolfgang cried. "It's Kay!"

Lynn looked, saw the blood dripping from the blond hair of the figure skater. Karl, her partner, was holding her in his arms as if she were a baby. He seemed too choked to speak. Wolfgang guessed, "She hit her head on the ice in the death spiral."

Agonized, Karl nodded.

Lynn directed him to lay the girl down on the examining table, recalling fleetingly that the death spiral must be the maneuver she and Todd had watched through the lobby window. Looking down at Kay as she lay limp and shocked, Lynn found it hard to believe this was the same girl who had swirled and pirouetted over the ice with such grace and ease. Gently she lifted Kay's eyelids to check the pupils. They were not dilated—no brain concussion. She examined the torn wound at the back of her skull. Even though it was bleeding profusely, it was not a deep cut. Quickly she set to work, shaving away the hair, and scrubbing and cleaning the wound, then sealing it in a plastic bandage. When she told Wolfgang and Karl that she wanted to keep Kay in the White Room for a while to observe her, they finally took their departure, but reluctantly.

It was a good twenty minutes while Lynn moved about the room attending to her duties before Kay made a sound. Then suddenly, she blurted: "Nurse, will I get to skate in the Olympics?"

"Of course you will. You're not hurt very badly."

Kay sighed. "Karl would be horribly disappointed if we didn't. He's been waiting for this chance the whole four years we've skated together."

"Why, you'll be back practicing in a week," Lynn said with assurance.

Again Kay sighed. "I—I was hoping you'd say I couldn't."

In her surprise, Lynn almost dropped the tray of instruments she was putting into the cabinet. But she said quietly, "Why do you say that?"

Without warning, Kay broke into sobs. "I—I don't want to skate."

"Hey," Lynn said gently, reaching her hand down and touching Kay gently on the brow. "You're not going to fall apart because of a little bump on your head."

"It's not that," Kay cried. "It's something lots worse than just a bump on my head."

Lynn knew immediately that it was. The misery on the girl's face was real. Softly she invited, "Kay, is it something you'd like to tell somebody about? Sometimes it helps to tell the right person."

The girl pushed her palms against her face in a gesture of despair. "No! No, I can't. It's my own problem."

Lynn reached for her hand. "What is it, Kay?"

The girl gasped. "Karl and I are in love and he wants me to marry him and—and now I can't."

"Whatever stops two people in love from getting married?"

"Not everybody has a problem like mine," the girl blurted, tears overflowing her eyes. "If I tell him what has happened, he'll stop loving me. I know he will!"

Lynn tried to bolster the girl's spirits. "It can't be that bad, Kay. There isn't a problem in the world that can't be worked out some way."

"Not mine," Kay persisted forlornly. "You see, I was married before, and now I'm—I'm pregnant."

Lynn gulped. "Oh?"

"I didn't know it when Charles and I were divorced. We got one of those quick Nevada divorces, and everything was over before I realized I was going to have a baby."

"Does your ex-husband know?"

"What difference does that make? We're legally divorced."

"Does Karl know anything at all about it?"

"No. No. Now you see why I dread telling him. He'll hate me if he thinks I can't skate in the Olympic competition." She plunged her tear-stained face into her hands. "Just knowing I'm going to have another man's baby will do something to his feelings."

"Kay, you've got to tell Karl."

"I—I can't."

"But you must. If he loves you, it won't make any difference. When two people are really in love, nothing else matters."

"I know he loves me," Kay professed fiercely. "I know he does. But he didn't tell me until I got my final divorce decree

just three weeks ago. Then he confessed how he has loved me secretly from the time we first became partners in the Ice Follies. Charles was the publicity agent for the show, and the three of us were thrown together a lot. Karl would never have told me he loved me if I hadn't gotten a divorce. He's that kind of man. He's a wonderful man."

"Well, if he's that nice," Lynn told her, "and he does love you as much as you think, then he isn't going to hate you." She paused, then quickly demanded, "You love him—don't you?"

"Yes," she said tearfully. "But right now I'm too confused to even think about love."

"I know you are. But it doesn't mean that you and Karl can't talk about this problem. You have to—because of the Olympics."

"That's—that's when he'll really be angry. For months and months all he's thought about has been winning the figure-skating event. Now maybe we can't even skate." Again she plunged her hands against her tear-stained face. "And Wolfgang—our teacher! When he finds out, he'll be furious."

"Your partner and your teacher are both going to have to forget about your winning any blue ribbons at the Games," Lynn stated flatly. "Girls who are going to have babies simply don't engage in strenuous sports. Probably the reason you got hurt today is because you were nervous."

"I've been nervous ever since I found out about the baby."

"That's why you've got to talk it over with Karl immediately. If I'm right, this man who's been your partner for so long is going to be very glad you told him."

"You—you can't mean that."

"I certainly do."

The girl sighed. "But there's also Wolfgang to consider," she mourned. "He was so anxious to be the coach of an Olympic champion. He was sure—"

"Wolfgang will have to wait until another time to satisfy his ego," Lynn snapped.

Kay lay still for a moment, her face impassive. Then a mere trace of a smile played at her lips. "Thank you, Nurse," she said quietly. "Ten minutes ago I thought this was something I couldn't possibly tell anyone. And here I've told you—a perfect stranger—*everything*."

"I'll bet you feel better already for telling me."

"I do."

"And you'll feel even better when you've told Karl."

Kay smiled. "Somehow you make it sound so—well, like it might all work out. . . . "

That night, after Lynn had climbed into bed, she reread the letter from Carmen Marie that had come in the noon post. It was full of hope that their dwindling house fund might soon be rebuilt now that Lynn's father had finally returned to work. Since they now had a steady income again, they no longer would be using their savings; they would be resaving. She wrote as if the money for the house in Fernando Acres was again within reach, and speculated glowingly about the future home. Two bedrooms, she hoped it would have, and a dining room, she prayed. With so much, it would be like one of the grand *haciendas* in her beloved homeland. As she always did, again she mentioned that none of her wonderful dreams could possibly come true without Lynn's generosity.

The serious accounting of the funds in the letter seemed to increase the seriousness of Lynn's gambling losses. Two hundred dollars seemed like a vast amount when you were suddenly relieved of it. Especially when there was no reserve to draw on. Lynn's expenditure for ski paraphernalia and warm winter clothing for mountain living, which she had bought before she left home, had reduced her savings fund to a token sum.

The thought struck her that if she wanted two hundred dollars, it was hers for the asking. All she had to do was to write her mother for it, and it would be forthcoming without question. But her good sense forbade it. Never would she be an intermediary in taking money from one parent to aid the other. And above all, she was not about to reveal her dereliction at the gambling tables at the Pair-O-Dice. That, she resolved, she would tell no one. Not Carmen Marie. Not Steve.

Especially Steve.

He had taken her to the Pair-O-Dice that one night very much against her wishes, and if he found out she had slipped off and gone with Pearl, he'd be utterly disgusted. And if he found out she had lost so heavily, he'd explode!

Tomorrow was the day he was coming to take her to Squaw Valley to see the new dorms. A warm glow invaded her when she thought what a marvelous day they were

bound to have. She'd wear her slate-colored blazer and pink mittens and matching skull cap. And, of course, she'd take along her skis to show him how much she had improved. They would watch the exciting jumps and the relays and the bobsled trials, and perhaps they'd tramp off alone over the snow on some remote trail, the mysterious hush of the great mountains all around them.

But until Lynn was riding with him the next day in the sleigh pulled by a team of matched huskies, she did not know how much joy the trip would hold.

The late afternoon shadows lay like grey blankets on the white snow. A thousand wonderful sounds came out of the early dusk. The big lap robe tucked around them on the narrow seat fended off some of the sharp, mountain wind. Beneath it, Steve's hand clasped hers hard and tight.

"I feel just like a character in some Jack London story about the frozen north," Lynn professed. "Isn't this fun—riding in a real sleigh?"

"And with real dogs to pull us," he augmented in the same carefree spirit.

Together they watched the strong white bodies leap ahead on the snow. It was the first time Lynn had ever ridden behind a pack of dogs. She wondered if Steve might have bribed the man who owned the team to allow them to drive alone. The couple who had ridden just ahead of them were accompanied by the driver.

Above the soft dragging of the runners as they slipped over the snow, Steve spoke. "The man who owns this outfit should make a mint of money during the Games. It's quite a novelty."

Lynn took a more realistic view. "I'm wondering how these Alaskan huskies will take to such a sudden change in climate."

"Alaska's not much colder than this." He laughed. "If his dogs do get the sniffles, he can bring them to you."

"I'm a nurse. Not a veterinarian," she qualified. "Murder! Wouldn't Mr. Radin yell if I started attending strange dogs. He's never really forgiven me for going to see Mrs. Perry."

"By gosh, wasn't it remarkable about that little old lady licking that ruptured appendix?"

"Little old mountain ladies are pretty tough. But I really don't know what this community would do without Dr. Fritchy. He's indispensable."

Beneath the robe Lynn felt Steve suddenly take a fresh grip on her hand. "That's what you are too, darling," he whispered huskily. "Indispensable to me. You're soft and sweet and—well—you're just everything wonderful."

Her heart pounded. "Steve, no girl's all those things."

"You are." He cupped her chin in his hands and lifted her lips to his. A flood of ecstasy raced through every vein of her body. Then suddenly his strong arms were around her, and he clasped her to him, hard and possessively. His voice came from far down in his throat: "If I could take you apart and put you back together again, I wouldn't change you a bit."

"S-Steve, there's something about me you wouldn't like," she heard herself say. "If you knew."

"No, there's nothing."

"Yes, there is. You'd never forgive me."

"All right, confess."

She pulled away from him to brace herself. "I really shouldn't tell you this. But I guess I want to. I just don't want to have any secrets from you."

"Well—tell me."

"All right. You know the casino, the Pair-O-Dice, where we went together?"

"How could I ever forget that clip joint?"

"Now, Steve, it's not really a clip joint. It's perfectly respectable, as casinos go. Todd Gilmore would never be connected with anything that wasn't."

He gave her a quizzical glance and declared, "It amazes me, Lynn, how much you always know about that fellow."

"Everybody knows about the Gilmore family. They're practically a landmark around here with all their money."

"You seem to, anyway," he snapped harshly, then waited for her to continue.

She began again. "What I want to tell you has nothing to do with personalities. It's about the casino. You see, last Monday, my day off, Pearl and I went to the casino."

"Alone? Or with Mr. Gilmore?"

"With Wong Duck. He drove us there in his truck. Now that it's all over, I know how foolish it was. But I guess we all have to learn by mistakes. Like you said once, all isn't gold that glitters." She dropped her eyes. "That's exactly true of gambling. I—I lost two hundred dollars."

Steve did not explode as she had expected he would. A

little abstractedly he said, "Well, I guess it's all right, if you can afford to lose that kind of money."

"Aren't you even going to tell me I was foolish?"

"It's your money."

"Steve, I don't understand you. You're so opposed to gambling. I was certain you'd be furious."

"Are you disappointed I'm not?"

She dropped her eyes. "I—I thought you'd care."

Suddenly his voice became caustic, and she realized immediately why he had manifested such an attitude. "I tried to tell myself that this weird fascination Gilmore has for you was my imagination, but now I see I should have known differently."

Her mouth flew open in disbelief. "Steve Matson!"

He shrugged, moved with his jealousy to his corner of the sleigh. "You don't deny you see him every day at the Tamarac, do you?"

"Of course I see him," she cried back in a hurt voice. "He's a guest there while he's recuperating from his amputations."

"And instructing you in the fine art of gambling?"

White fury over his gross unfairness engulfed her. It was bad enough that she had lost her money. And to tell him about it had been as hard as it was—she realized now—unnecessary. Now, to have him accuse her so groundlessly was heaping insult onto injury. She glared at him. "If that's what you want to make out of it," she snapped, returning an eye for an eye, "it's all right with me. Now—if you'll take me home—!"

"Of course," he returned. He took up the slack in the reins; his voice cracked like a pistol. "*Mush!*" he shouted at the dogs.

Chapter XI

One long, empty week passed, and Steve did not call nor come to the Tamarac. Lynn reckoned that he was wallowing in his jealousy and reasoned desperately with herself that he would eventually realize the utter senselessness of his behavior and come to see her. It wasn't possible that they would never kiss and love and laugh and be happy together again.

That might have happened exactly as she hoped it would if Todd Gilmore had not asked her to drive him in his new sports car up to the Gilmore lumber mill. His amputations, he said, were still tender when he wore shoes, and he preferred not to drive the unfamiliar mountain roads just yet. And it was quite imperative that he go, as two of his brothers and a sister-in-law were flying out to the mill on business and wanted to see him. If Lynn hadn't been so hurt and angry at Steve, she might not have gone. And most certainly she would never, never have gone if she had had any way of comprehending what would develop from the thirty-five-mile jaunt.

On the surface, everything seemed so readymade for the short trip. It was Monday, her day off. Pearl had just given her a shampoo and set, and she had the fresh feeling that always comes with a new hairdo. Besides, she was suffering from a case of cabin fever. The lodge, the mountains, the same faces, had closed in on her.

Lynn did not know that Todd had a special reason for wanting her to go with him. And he did not tell her what it was until she was steering the little red imported car over the narrow mountain roads. "This is going to be a very spe-

cial occasion for me, Lynn, introducing you to my brothers." And then he dumfounded her by adding, "I only wish I could tell them you were my fiancee and that it would be true."

"Todd," she gulped after an awkward silence, "you're silly talking that way. I'm your nurse. And besides—"

"Does it hurt if I wish you were my sweetheart?" he begged in a solemn voice. "Lynn, you can't blame a man for falling in love with you."

Feeling completely incapable of words, she somehow managed to falter, "But—but, Todd, we've never been anything but friends."

He clamped his gloved hand over hers on the steering wheel and demanded in a husky voice, "Lynn, darling, why do you think I've been staying on at the Tamarac all this time? You know it wasn't because of the amputations. I've been well for a long time. You must have known that." His voice grew even more meaningful. "It was because I wanted to be near you. Just to get a glimpse of you when you passed through the lobby or went into the coffee shop. You didn't know it, but I used to stand on the front porch and watch you ski off down the trail. Every time I see you skimming down that slope, I think you're the most beautiful, graceful woman I've ever seen."

Lynn searched quickly for words, but Todd was not ready to let her speak. "I know," he went on, "I haven't any right to talk to you like this—when there's Steve Matson. But, Lynn, I had to tell you. It was driving me mad keeping it to myself, not telling you. A couple of times I went off by myself and got drunk just to escape thinking about you."

Lynn noticed the gathering tension in his voice, and she sensed that he must have spent many hours brooding over her. She was both stunned and surprised. Not wanting to offend him or hurt his feelings by bluntly rebuffing him, she said tactfully but impersonally, "I should be very mad at you, Todd Gilmore, for fibbing to me about not being able to drive."

"I know. I lied," he confessed, dejectedly. "But I had to be with you just once away from the hotel. And I had to introduce you to my brothers. They've always been so conceited about their wives. I had to show them—"

"Todd," chided Lynn, "most men are conceited about their wives if they love them."

Todd laughed low. "You're right. If I were married to you, Lynn, I'd be far more conceited than my brothers."

Meeting Todd's brothers, Paul and Frank Gilmore, proved to be, however, a very pleasant experience for Lynn. And from the way Frank treated his wife, Audrey, in what Lynn thought was a kind of detached, businessman sort of way, she couldn't see that he was offensively conceited. Being a very chic little redhead, Audrey was indeed someone to be very proud of. And if either Frank or Paul held any ill-feeling toward Todd, it was not evident to Lynn as they all dined together at one of the resorts near the Gilmore lumber mill. To be sure, they jibed Todd about his investment in the Pair-O-Dice and warned him in a good-humored way not to get ensnarled in any vice rackets in his gambling operations. Then Audrey had quickly shifted the conversation back to their home town of Detroit and safer ground. Later in the evening, when she and Lynn waited under the shelter of the porch for the men to bring the cars around, she said, "Frank and I are delighted, Lynn, that Todd has found such a grand girl. Nothing would make his parents happier than for him to get married and settle down."

Lynn wanted to blurt out that she wasn't Todd's girl, but what good would it do? Todd, who always seemed to feel so inferior to his brothers, wanted them to think that he too could attract an interesting woman. So, to be cooperative, Lynn said to Audrey, "Todd and I have seen each other very often since he's been at the Tamarac."

Audrey took the remark to mean far more than it said. A knowing sparkle came into her eye, and she remarked, "It's simply marvelous what being in love does to a person. You've made a different man out of Todd."

Lynn suddenly wished she had given Audrey no reason to make the last remark. And when she arrived back at the Tamarac and discovered what had happened in her absence, she wished she had never set foot outside the lodge with Todd. For when she reported in at the desk, Cedric greeted her with the news that Steve had been to see her.

"Oh, no," Lynn groaned. "Not today, of all days!"

"He said he came because it was Monday, your day off. Wanted you to go up to Squaw Valley with him and see the high-jump tryouts."

As if she could feel Steve's anger engulfing her, she asked gloomily, "What did you tell him, Cedric?"

Cedric gulped. "Well, Lynn, that's one guy you don't beat around the bush with. He wanted a yes or no answer. So I gave it to him. Said you drove off with Mr. Gilmore to his lumber mill and you weren't expected back until about midnight."

"I see." Lynn sighed. Stubborn as he was, Steve would never believe the real reason she had gone with Todd.

"I'm sorry, Lynn," Cedric apologized. "Maybe this was one time you shouldn't have left word where you'd be. Then I could have said honestly I didn't know where you were." He reached into her box behind the desk. "Here's a letter he left for you."

Lynn took it, ripped open the envelope. It was written on hotel stationery in a bold, hasty hand. It didn't even begin "Dear Lynn." It just said: "Hope you had a wonderful time with Gilmore. Sorry I can't compete with a million dollars. I won't bother you again. Steve."

Cedric, who had devoured her every expression as she read, blurted, "Gosh, Lynn, I'm sorry if I caused trouble by telling him where you were."

"That's all right," she replied, suppressing a tear. "I wouldn't have wanted you to tell him anything but the truth."

A cold, empty desolateness filled her. Steve was acting as if he was determined to destroy their relationship by jealousy. The memory of the night when they had ridden in the sleigh behind the dogs came back to her. Talking, laughing, kissing, and then, suddenly, Steve was biting, snapping mad, ending a glorious evening in anger.

Now he was even angrier. Lynn could not help but contemplate what a lonely situation Kay would be facing if Karl had responded to her problems with the same hot temper and intolerance. Certainly, they wouldn't be planning their wedding in Reno this coming Sunday. It could mean only one thing: Karl must love Kay very deeply to want to marry her and bring up another man's child as his very own. But Steve couldn't picture Lynn in the company of another man without concluding she was madly in love with him. Why did he have to have this one ornery trait when otherwise she could love everything about him?

Just contemplating it made her limp with misery. If he

could be this intolerant of the situation with Todd, he'd probably make an issue of it if he learned she was paired off with Wolfgang Sunday as Kay and Karl's wedding attendants.

Mr. Radin had granted Lynn the day off for Kay and Karl's nuptials, and as she dressed for the ceremony she wondered if the blue wool costume suit was dressy enough for a wedding. But somehow, this wedding did not call for buttons and bows. Even though Kay and Karl were desperately in love, there seemed to be a shadow hanging over the whole affair.

But later that afternoon, in the small florist shop in Reno, when Wolfgang pushed back the shoulder of Lynn's winter coat and pinned the corsage of pink rosebuds to her lapel, her suit took on a festive flair.

And the white orchid that Karl pinned to Kay's white knit dress with the tiny Peter Pan collar of seed pearls gave it a bridal look. But Kay, though she smiled at Karl, did not give the appearance of a bride bubbling with happiness.

Wolfgang, with his loquaciousness, added the only light note to the affair. Selecting white carnations from the florist's tray, he handed one to the prospective groom and said lightly, "If your hands will quit shaking long enough, pin this on your suit."

Lynn sprang to Karl's defense. "Don't you know all grooms have the right to be nervous on their wedding day?"

Wolfgang laughed. "Okay, let them both be as nervous as they want today. But they'd better not get the jitters when they get on that Olympic ice."

At his words the tension in the little flower shop tightened, and Lynn realized that Wolfgang was totally unaware that Kay and Karl would not be participating as a team in the competition. So sure and confident of themselves and each other on the ice, the young couple now seemed like total strangers. Was it their anticipation of Wolfgang's reaction once they did tell him, or was it merely a case of prenuptial jitters? Lynn wished they would try to act a little more festive. And she had to credit Wolfgang for the only high spirits of the day.

As they rode to the office of the justice of the peace, past a number of wedding chapels—establishments quite common in a town where both marriage and divorce were quickly

and easily come by—Wolfgang leaned over and whispered to Lynn, "After we get the lovebirds off on their honeymoon we'll go out on the town. Reno's quite a spot after the bright lights go on."

It was the first Lynn knew that the newlyweds had any intentions of honeymooning and that following the nuptials she would be stranded alone with Wolfgang. She had thought they all were returning to the Tamarac. That, however, was a matter for appraisal later, as the car was now halted at their destination.

The judge's wife, a homey sort of woman with an unfashionable hairdo and wearing a paisley print jersey dress, asked the girls if they wouldn't like to use her bedroom to "freshen up a speck." Kay jumped with fervor at the suggestion, as if she were groping for one last minute alone before she plunged into matrimony. No sooner had the bedroom door closed than she blurted out, "Oh, Lynn, maybe I shouldn't go through with it!"

"Sh-h! Don't start getting emotional."

Kay nervously twisted her white embroidered handkerchief into a string. "But can't you tell? Karl seems so moody about it. How do I know he's not just marrying me because he feels sorry for me?"

"He loves you, and you know it," Lynn said, helping Kay adjust her corsage. "You should be gloriously happy he wants to be the father of your baby."

"I know I'm lucky," Kay blubbered, starting to weep. "But still—"

"Kay, stop crying! You're going to get married in ten minutes. You can't do it with red eyes." She dropped her brusqueness and made an attempt at lightheadedness. "Leave the crying to me. It's the people in the audience who are supposed to cry. Not the bride."

"Lynn, I don't feel like a real bride at all."

"Now, stop talking like that," Lynn ordered. "You've got to quit wallowing in your misery. Give Karl a little credit. He's been wonderful about the whole thing."

"I know," Kay answered. "But—but a girl likes to think the man she's going to marry—really loves her—not just pities her."

That was a point Lynn could not dispute, and she had no way of knowing the real extent of Karl's love for Kay. She said tactfully, "Well, he didn't waste any time arranging the

ceremony. If he's moody, maybe it's just because he's nervous."

"I'd like to think you're right. I—I wouldn't want to ever see Karl unhappy."

"I'm pretty sure he won't be."

Kay still refused to be convinced. "If it's not remorse over the wedding, it must be missing out on the Olympics. Or maybe he's worried about what Wolfgang will say when he learns the truth."

Lynn again adjusted Kay's corsage. "Shh. Kay, you've got to stop being pessimistic and be grateful for what's happening. Your baby is going to have a wonderful father."

The girl dropped her eyes. "Yes—I know it. I should be ashamed of myself. Especially when Karl's being so noble."

Lynn smiled. "Then wipe your eyes and put some powder on your nose. We mustn't keep the justice waiting."

The judge plainly was impatient to get on with the ceremony, which was impersonal and hurried. Hardly before any of them realized it, they were outside at the curb, Kay looking a little less nervous, Karl much more poised and attentive.

Lynn slipped her arm around Kay's waist. "You were a beautiful bride."

Her husband looked shyly at her as though he were seeing her beauty for the first time. "Gosh, darling—you sure are pretty in that white dress."

"And how," Wolfgang demanded, "could the queen of the ice be anything but beautiful?" With a swing of his arm he invited them into the car. "Let's be off to the Mapes. The wedding cake and champagne are waiting."

The Mapes Hotel, one of the biggest and showiest in town, had, like almost all other places of business in Nevada, a lobby filled with slot machines. The wedding party entered its revolving doors to the clink of coins, and to the sound of music coming from the dining room.

Wolfgang, who had reserved a table in advance, ordered champagne immediately so they could toast the newlyweds. With the glasses held high and touching in a musical tinkle, he toasted: "To Kay and Karl—the new Olympic figure-skating champions."

There was a flat silence. Lynn groped for words to save the moment. She proposed a more appropriate toast. "To the happy bride and groom. May you have a million joys."

They drank, and then Karl spoke. "We ought to drink a toast to you, Wolfgang. Without your coaching, Kay and I wouldn't have gotten anywhere." He smiled adoringly at his bride. "And we wouldn't be married now. Isn't that right, darling?"

Wolfgang looked down into the bubbles of his champagne. "Don't thank me for coaching you and Kay," he said solemnly. "Wait until you kids skate off with that Olympic medal. That's all the thanks I want."

Lynn cringed as she thought how abjectly disappointed Wolfgang was going to be when he learned the facts. And for all his arrogance she experienced a compassion as she anticipated his feeling. She speculated a little dismally whether the evening would end without his finding out about Kay's pregnancy. Later, it would not matter so much. But tonight it would. It was their wedding night.

The evening for the foursome ended at nine, immediately following the wedding supper, when the newlyweds, who were to stay in the hotel's bridal suite, said good night.

On the sidewalk outside the hotel, as the cold winter air licked at their faces, Lynn complimented Wolfgang on his efficiency as best man. "Orchids, champagne, bridal suites," she recited.

His dark eyes sparkled recklessly. "If you think I'm efficient as being a best man," he said, "you should see me cut a curve at the roulette table. Come on, let's walk down to Harrah's Club and try our luck."

She immediately resisted. "No gambling for me tonight. I'm due back at the Tamarac before long."

"It's only a little after nine. The evening's just a pup."

"No. Really, I must get back."

He refused such a limp excuse. Laughingly he prodded her: "Don't you know no one comes to Reno or Las Vegas unless they take a turn at a roulette wheel?"

It was the first time Lynn thought of the envelope in her purse with her month's salary in it. She suddenly wished it were back in her dresser at the Tamarac.

Ironically, the real temptation was not to spend it at Harrah's Club, where Wolfgang finally prevailed upon her to go for a brief twenty minutes. It came later. On their way back to the Tamarac, when they came to the state line and drove slowly down the short boulevard of casinos, the lights

of the Pair-O-Dice, flickering on and off, seemed to wave a personalized welcome.

"Let's stop off here for a cup of coffee," Wolfgang said casually. "We've got a lot of winding mountain roads ahead. I don't want to fall asleep at the wheel."

Lynn didn't want to go anyplace with Wolfgang—the Pair-O-Dice, least of all. She didn't want to see Todd Gilmore if he happened to be there. She didn't want to be faced with the temptation of keeping the latch sealed on her purse so that she would not weaken and spend even a single dime on a one-arm bandit.

She didn't want any of these things to happen.

But everyone of them did. And she arrived back at the Tamarac *broke.*

Morning dawned as bleak and murky as the ache and shame in Lynn's heart. As she pushed her head deeper into the pillows and looked out at the new morning dressed in its inevitable gown of shimmering white snow, she wondered how she could have been so utterly stupid as to set foot in the Pair-O-Dice. The bingo table had relieved her not only of her two hundred and fifty dollar salary but also of another measure of her self-esteem and dignity. It was one thing to make a mistake once, but it was sheer stupidity to repeat the mistake and walk open-eyed into the same trap a second time.

It was not for a love or fascination of gambling that she had done it. It was not the desire to follow the crowd or to be a good fellow or to celebrate the wedding in a gay, carefree manner. It was a more practical reason. It was a sudden and overwhelming impulse to try to recoup her former losses.

It was a limp, simple reason, but it was true.

It hadn't been the reason, however, that she had given Todd when he had seen her alone at the roulette table and come over to where she was. He'd stood very close behind her and watched her play. Then, as usual, he'd gotten concerned about her heavy betting and whispered a warning into her ear. "Remember, don't play more than you can afford to lose." Then, when she went right on playing, he became more concerned and finally said, "All right, if you *must* gamble, Miss Spendthrift, come over and drop a few

nickles in the slot machine. You can't get hurt very badly."

Chidingly she told him, "If you talk to all your customers like that, the Pair-O-Dice won't make any money."

"The Pair-O-Dice doesn't want to make a red cent off you, and you know it. Come on. Let's walk out in the lounge where we can talk. I want to tell you about the letter I got from Audrey."

Lynn looked and saw Wolfgang engrossed in watching a game at one of the green-felted tables, his eyes half on the game, half on the good-looking girl dealer in the pink satin blouse with big billowy sleeves. Half smiling at his usual flirtatiousness, Lynn let Todd steer her toward the foyer. "How is Audrey?" she inquired.

"Fine, as always. And she wants to be remembered to you."

"She's awfully nice. I really enjoyed meeting her."

"Maybe you think she didn't go for you. She wrote me she thought you'd made the *ideal* sister-in-law." He paused, gave her an enigmatic side glance. "Say, what did you two girls talk about that night?"

Taken aback by his remarks, Lynn returned falteringly, "Well—I—I don't know what I said to make her write that." She gave a little hollow laugh and added that sometimes people misinterpret things that have been said.

Todd looked at her with his warm, haunting eyes. "You must have told her something. She's already claiming you for a sister-in-law. She's even told my mother all about you, and they're talking about you two girls being neighbors in Detroit. You know, Audrey and Frank have built a good-looking new home out in Queen's Row. That's a new subdivision."

Visibly embarrassed, Lynn bluntly said that Audrey was certainly jumping at wild conclusions and that she was sorry she went to the mill if everything was going to get so mixed up.

"Lynn, I wouldn't have missed taking you to meet my family for anything." Todd's eyes engulfed her hungrily. "You know—I've felt differently about my brothers ever since we went. Maybe it was just having them all like you so much that makes me see them in another light."

Lynn was glad that some good had come from the trip, even though Todd's family's view of her was completely distorted. Why couldn't it have been some other girl who

had won over Todd's family and cemented a firmer relationship between them and Todd? Certainly there must be dozens and dozens of girls who'd love the chance to marry into such a rich and charming family as the Gilmores.

And certainly some other girl who bumped into Todd at the casino wouldn't be yearning for a big handsome lug like Steve Matson to telephone. And above all, another girl who had even a fraction of intelligence wouldn't be so quick to lose her month's salary at the gambling table.

But all her brooding, Lynn knew, would not bring back her money. And this time it was a loss that had serious financial repercussions. This was her current salary, funds for her personal needs and obligations for the whole month—insurance, clothing, the dozens of small things money went for. But for the fortunate fact that her maintenance was taken care of by the hotel, she would at this moment be in a difficult situation. A person simply did not dip into the last bit of their savings unless it was the direst emergency.

If I just didn't have to write Carmen Marie and tell her the truth, Lynn thought miserably, *I could weather the storm.* But it wasn't fair not to write her. Too many hopes and joys were wrapped up in the dreams of the little house. It was better that Carmen Marie know now that Lynn could not do her share to help those dreams come true.

Chapter XII

As if Lynn's state of existence were not already unhappy enough, Pearl dealt a new blow one morning in the White Room when she told Lynn: "This is going to crush you—but Steve's being transferred. Buster saw him down on the highway, and he told him all about it."

"Steve being transferred!" Lynn cried. "It can't be!" She paused from her task of stacking the freshly laundered towels in the cabinet and felt an ache suddenly spreading inside her.

"Now, Lynn, you know how these highway jobs are. Here today, gone tomorrow. They finish one stretch of road, and the highway department ships them on to another."

"When—when is he going?"

"Maybe he's already gone. Buster said they'd moved all the heavy machinery out." Pearl sighed, twirled around on the little stool, and looked out at the light-falling snow. "Honey, don't be like most of my customers and fall apart when something happens to their love life. Be big."

Lynn's composure was slowly returning. "Who—who said I was falling apart? For a minute I was peeved because Steve didn't tell me himself."

"Maybe it's easier this way, Honey. Cracked-up romances don't glue back together like broken china. When they go *wham*, they stay busted. Gosh, Lynn, look at the way Steve has treated you. He hasn't called or come to this lodge in —how long has it been? You'd be crazy to waste a day try-

ing to patch up a broken romance. You don't have to—with a swell fellow like Todd Gilmore mad about you."

Lynn pressed irritably at her temples. "How did Todd Gilmore get into this!"

"How? You know as well as I do. You can't walk across the lobby without him following every step you take."

"Oh, Pearl! Todd is just a friend."

"That's because you've never given him a chance to be anything but."

"You're imagining things."

"Am I?" Pearl rippled her fingers idly through her bleached blond hair and went on gazing out at the snow. "Now that Steve's gone, maybe you'll have a chance to see what I mean. Todd's got too much honor to try to cut in on another man's girl."

"Oh, for goodness' sakes, Pearl, don't try to make something out of nothing."

"Lynn, don't always be brushing Todd off. Don't forget the Gilmores aren't exactly paupers."

Lynn arched an eyebrow. "Weren't you the girl who said love was one commodity money couldn't buy?"

"This is different from the Strovels. In this case it would be a nice extra dividend. See what I mean?" She twirled on the stool so she could look straight at Lynn, her eyes glowing with persuasion. "Just think. You'd have everything. Money, position, a marvelous husband. All the things a girl dreams of. Why, as a woman you'd be independently wealthy and able to do all sorts of wonderful things with your money."

"The next thing you'll be saying is that then it would be all right if I lost money at the Pair-O-Dice because it would still be in the family."

Pearl laughed. "I hadn't thought of that, honey."

"Well, Todd Gilmore's a nice enough person, but he doesn't mean a thing to me."

"Oh, *la.*"

"Well, it's true," Lynn insisted.

"I just can't imagine anyone turning down all that money —and everything."

"I can."

Pearl sighed. "It's everybody to her own taste." She glanced at her wrist watch. "Whoops! I've got to be off. I used up my coffee break to drop in."

When Pearl was gone, Lynn took advantage of the silence to take stock of what had been said. It was all true about Todd Gilmore. He did have money and position and charm. Indeed, he would make some girl an ideal husband. Lynn found herself comparing him to Steve. How completely different they were! Steve so natural and straightforward, so completely in charge of every situation—as genuine as the silver in these very mountains. And then the sudden, devastating truth gripped her that Steve was going away, that maybe he'd already gone and she might never see him again. Was it really possible that he could have left without telling her good-bye? Was he that completely through with her?

A strange hissing sound at the White Room door snapped her abruptly from her reflections. She looked up and saw Wong Duck, the Chinese cook. He was dressed in his outdoor clothing, his almond eyes fired with excitement.

"What is it, Wong?"

"Missy Ryan, come quick! I take you with me."

"With you where?" she asked, trying to cut through his devious Oriental ways.

As he stepped into the White Room, Wong Duck pointed through the window into the distance. "Dead Man's Cliff! It is so dreadful. I ski by there and what do I find? In a thousand honorable years you could not guess."

"What did you find?"

"A man! Maybe dead. Hurry, I take you."

"Why didn't you get the Ski Patrol?"

He shrugged his frail shoulders to denote his exasperation. "Ski Patrol! I join my ancestors before I can find them."

"Did you look?"

"No. But I know they are down watching the ski jumpers. It is you he need, Missy Ryan. All over the snow is blood."

"Is he a guest from the hotel?"

"I do not think so. He dress like mountain man. Maybe he from over the hill."

"In that case—I'm sorry, but I can't go with you, Wong. An accident like this should be referred to the Ski Patrol."

Wong stretched his small head toward her in the posture of a turtle emerging from its shell. "You mean you let poor devil die like chicken caught in fence? You cannot be one who is so heartless."

"Wong, it's not fair to say that. My job is to treat hotel

guests. Not all the people roaming over the countryside who get into trouble. If you ask at the desk, the clerk will call the Ski Patrol. Or wait—I'll phone."

Wong's eyes shrank to thin slits. He shook his head sadly as he shuffled slowly toward the door. "No, do not bother. I get Ski Patrol—if poor devil not already bleed to death by time they come."

Lynn swallowed hard. "Oh, all right! I'll go with you. But don't say anything about this to anyone. Mr. Radin won't approve."

"Ha!" Wong said, his face brightening now that Lynn had agreed to go. "I shall be silent like Buddha—"

Lynn hastened into her parka. "You have no idea who this man is?"

"Never have my eyes seen him before. He is somebody off the trail."

"Can we go on snowshoes?"

"No, Missy Ryan. Skis. Snowshoes go slow like the tortoise."

A thrill of excitement coursed through Lynn as she thought of racing to the rescue on skis. *Looks as though the lessons are paying off,* she reflected. *Everybody always predicted I'd need skis someday. I wonder who the man is?*

After they had gone outside and she had gotten the bindings of her skis adjusted, she and Wong Duck glided off in the biting cold down the infrequently used south trail. Wong Duck wore a pack containing two blankets, and she had her nurse's kit slung over her shoulder. Curiously she asked him, "What were you doing on this off-beat trail? Nobody skis down here."

He looked guilty. "You will not tell if I confess?"

She promised.

As though there were ears in the vast loneliness to hear him he spoke in hushed tones. "My wife, my beautiful young wife, live in cabin at end of trail. Mr. Radin—he not approve of Chinese cook having beautiful wife at lodge." He paused. "Now you see, Missy, why I hide her in mountains in old cabin and come to see her every day. I bring my Lotus Flower goodies the pastry maker give to me."

"What a romantic arrangement," Lynn said, "having your wife tucked away in the hills."

"Ah, but not always will we hide in the mountains and live like the hermits. I make good wage at Tamarac. Lotus

Flower and I save. Someday we return to city and live in Chinatown. San Francisco Chinatown, maybe. Then I make nice home for beautiful wife."

Lynn said again, "It certainly sounds romantic."

"If I did not have the heart of a cupid, and go every day to see her, then today I would not find the poor devil hanging on the cliff."

"Hanging on the cliff? What do you mean?"

"Oh, not a big cliff, Missy," he assured her quickly. "Only a little one." He lifted the hem of his parka, showed her a hemp rope coiled around his narrow waistline. "Look! We can rescue him with this."

Disturbed by Wong Duck's elaboration of the situation, she asked pointedly, "Wong Duck, why didn't you do as I suggested and call the Ski Patrol? This is no job for a woman; this is a rescue operation."

"It is a job for a nurse," he insisted. "The man bleeds bad."

Lynn dipped around a stump in her path. "I know," she decreed suddenly, "I know exactly why you didn't want to call the Ski Patrol. You were afraid they would ask questions and find out about your wife and tell Mr. Radin. So you got me to come with you. You couldn't have lived with your conscience if you hadn't done something to help the man."

The Chinaman drooped his head. "Like a book you read Wong Duck's mind," he admitted. "But, Missy Ryan, too late now is it to think of such things. We are nearly there."

"How far did you say he'd fallen?"

"Not far. Five feet, maybe." But he did explain that the man was now on a small ledge above a deep canyon. "We both lift him with rope, and bandage bleeding wounds. None but we three ever know. Savvy?"

"Well, it's a good thing we brought blankets," she answered. "If he's like one case I had out in these mountains, he'll probably have frozen hands and feet."

They came suddenly to the end of the trail, and Wong Duck called out ahead. "Yoohoo! Yoohoo! Help has come! Are you there?"

There was only silence.

In a hushed tone, Wong Duck said, "It is lucky for him, Missy, he snag his breeches on stump and get hung. Or he head over heels fall into canyon below and self smash to dust." Suddenly they stood on the edge of the precipice and he pointed down. "Look!"

Standing safely back on the rim Lynn stretched her neck and peered below. The drop, of at least a hundred feet, was startling to her sense of equilibrium. But it was not until she saw *who* the man was that a raw fear invaded her.

Stunned, she stared at Todd Gilmore.

And he was literally hanging onto the small ledge below by a thread. Like Wong Duck said, his clothing was snagged to the bare branch of a stout stump that grew out of two boulders. Lynn saw the drops of bright red blood on the white snow. And then, unexpectedly, Todd stirred and turned his face upward.

But although his head had moved, Todd seemed more dead than alive. Lynn fell to her stomach on the cold snow and leaning over the cliff, spoke in a firm, reassuring voice: "Todd! Don't move! Be as quiet as you can. The limb might break."

If he recognized her voice, he did not reveal it. His head reeled around and fell limp against the rocky, snow-covered ledge. Inwardly furious at Wong Duck for refusing to summon the Ski Patrol, Lynn snapped, "Wong! Find something to hook that rope to. I'm going down where he is and try to help him up."

"Perhaps you not go. I go," he offered half-heartedly, as he began tying the rope to a pine-tree trunk.

"Tie it tight," she ordered. "I weigh a lot."

"Chinese people weigh less. Perhaps I go," he said in a second limp offer.

Lynn disregarded his remark and began tying the other end of the rope around her waist. On her lips was a prayer that if she did slip, the rope would hold her secure enough until she could regain her footing and get onto the ledge with Todd.

Wong Duck handed her a ski pole. "Dig this into the snow, Missy Ryan. It keep you from falling."

Lynn took it and looked for one minute at the gorge beyond the jutted ledge below. She was careful to pull the rope taut, and then, slowly, cautiously, every muscle alert and ready, she began her perilous descent. "I'm coming down to help you," she called out to Todd.

It was then that he showed the first sign of recognizing her. "Don't, Lynn!" he cried. "Don't do it! I want to die."

"Nobody wants to die," she contradicted, stunned as she had been once before in a situation that was so similar—a cir-

cumstance that had happened so long ago she'd nearly forgotten about it. It seemed more like fiction than reality that for a second time she was assisting in rescuing Todd Gilmore. Moving with the same sure cautiousness down the snow-packed, rocky wall, she spoke firmly: "Move toward the back of the ledge and make room for me to get on it."

He made no attempt to obey, but cried out, "Go back! Go back before you're killed. I don't want to be rescued. I want to die."

He was still admonishing her to forsake him and get back on safe ground when her foot came to rest on the rock ledge. There was barely room for both of them. Wong Duck called down in a breathless voice, "Do not move an inch or you will fall."

But Lynn had to shift her position in order to try to examine Todd. The only visual sign was a cut near his hairline from which the blood had dripped onto the snow. He kept muttering, ordering her to go back before it was too late. Mournfully he groaned, "I would have been dead already if my clothes hadn't caught on the stump."

She pretended to take no cognizance of what amounted to a suicidal confession. Flatly she asked, "Can you stand up?"

He shook his head and reached his arm toward his back. "Something's wrong here."

She thought quickly of a broken pelvis and almost instantly abandoned the thought of trying to get him up the steep incline by herself. Although Todd was a man of small physique, he, obviously, had no will to help himself. And the horrifying thought ripped through Lynn that with only one rope between them, one of them would surely slip from the ledge and fall to his death in the deep gorge below.

Fighting back the deep despair that was growing inside, Lynn lifted her gaze to Wong Duck. Her voice snapped like a brittle twig. "Ease the blankets down to me. Then go quick to the lodge and bring help."

"Yes, Missy," he said. This time he did not demur.

Lynn took the blankets and unfolded them to wrap around Todd. She made an attempt to lift the frightening tension that surrounded them by pretending lightheartedness: "This is getting to be a game. Trying to keep from freezing to death while we wait for somebody to come and rescue us."

Todd did not answer. He took her hand and gripped it

hard and turned his face away. He did not speak another word during the terrifying interval until the rescue party arrived.

Later, when asked by one of the men in the Ski Patrol how he happened to have skied so dangerously close to the cliff, Todd answered with pretended innocence, "I must have had an attack of snow blindness and lost my bearings." He gave a great, deep sigh. "Thank God I'm alive!"

With her own two ears Lynn heard him say it. *Why*, she asked herself, *does he try to hide his suicide attempts from everybody but me?*"

Chapter XIII

Luckily, Lynn was able to make arrangements for Todd to have a consultation the next Saturday night with Dr. Vanderburg, the psychiatrist who had recommended the job at the Tamarac to Lynn and who was coming to the lodge for a weekend of skiing.

Then something else happened, something that lifted Lynn into a state of wondrous joy. Steve Matson walked into the Tamarac!

Lynn was standing at the big stone fireplace, talking with Todd, when Steve came through the revolving door. She looked up at that moment, and their eyes met immediately. So completely surprised, so inwardly overjoyed was she at seeing his tall, lanky frame that she was completely oblivious to what his reaction might be in seeing her with Todd. All she could think of in the gloriously exciting moment was that he had come to see her. Or she hoped that was why he had come.

But a second later she was fully aware that the fast anger which crossed his face, and was distinguishable across the lobby, was ignited by the company she was with. Suddenly, as if his body had been jerked by a leash, Steve turned and stalked off toward the snack bar.

Desperately, Lynn thought, *I've got to talk to him! I've got to even if I have to give him a tranquilizer to make him listen.* Turning quickly to Todd, she said briefly, "Would you excuse me? A friend of mine just came into the lodge."

He complied reluctantly and only with the promise that she would hurry back so that they could finish their talk.

She saw Steve seated at the snack bar and slid onto the red leather stool next to him. "Hi," she said, tingling with the joy of his nearness.

Their eyes met in the mirror behind the bar. "Hello," he said politely. "I didn't mean to interrupt you."

"You didn't. I was just talking to one of the patients."

He turned his head slowly and looked straight into her eyes. "Patient! That's a laugh!"

His manner stung her to the quick, for at the moment, Todd was indeed very much her patient. Probably the most important one she had had since coming to the Tamarac. And it was something she must explain to Steve. But it certainly was obvious that if they were going to be able to talk things over like two intelligent people, she must be the one not to lose her temper. In a light, almost breezy voice she announced, "It's terribly nice seeing you again, Steve. Aren't you going to ask me how I'm getting along with my skiing?"

His whole body seemed to bulge with anger. "Who's been teaching you—Gilmore?"

"I'm past needing a teacher," she said, holding tight to her anger. "I can even take some little jumps now."

"Well, it's a wonder he hasn't been teaching you how to take some high jumps," he retorted derisively. "It seems every place you are, he's there, too. At least every time I see you."

"It's just a coincidence," she returned. "As you know, he's been staying here at the hotel while he's convalescing."

He glared at her. "Of course, I know. And I can see it makes for quite a cozy little situation. You can jump in his car—go here, go there—"

She knew he was referring to their trip to the Gilmore mill, but rather than dig up an old bone for him to chew on, she again made an effort to lift the conversation from the bitter wrangling. "Buster said he was talking to you about your new job."

"So you know I'm leaving."

"I thought maybe you'd already gone."

"I'm going next week—to Eureka." He laughed low. "Gilmore should like that. He won't have to worry about me popping in and out of the lodge unexpectedly and upsetting his dates."

Steve's sarcasm made her mad enough to spit. She didn't bother to tell him that she and Todd had not dated since the day they went together to the mill, and that that wasn't really a date. Nor did she tell him that probably Todd would not be living at the lodge much longer. If her suspicions were correct, Dr. Vanderburg would propose that he enter a sanitarium for treatment for the emotional condition that had produced his suicidal tendencies. But Steve's narrow, jealous attitude put her on the defensive, and she held her silence. At the moment she didn't really care if she ever told him anything. However, before he had a chance to be the first to bring up the latest situation regarding herself and Todd, she beat him to it by declaring, "By now, no doubt, you've heard of Mr. Gilmore's latest brush with death."

"Oh, yes. Yes, indeed," he said, and added with pomp, "Of course, I heard, too, about your part in the big drama. You seem to be making a career out of dramatic rescues of Gilmore."

The waitress interrupted to hand Lynn a menu.

"Just some coffee, Liz," Lynn said.

"Oh, you'd better have more than coffee," invited Steve, scanning his own menu but not appearing at all interested in what he saw. With his eyes still idly roaming the listings he added, "Are you having dinner with Mr. Gilmore *again* this evening?"

Lynn pivoted around on her chair. "Steve! What's the matter with you?" she blurted in a harsh whisper. "Why are you being so sarcastic? So jealous? You make me not even want to try and explain things to you."

"It's true, isn't it? You two did have dinner together last night."

"Yes, we did," she snapped, her anger suddenly belting out of control. "And we spent three hours or so sitting at the dinner table talking. It happened that we had some very important professional matters to talk about—and it had nothing to do with what you think."

"Oh! I'm sure you two must have had *many* things to talk about," he agreed condescendingly. "People with dough and gambling casinos and lumber mills usually have all sorts of problems to kick around. Especially if they've got a good listener."

She was undecided at the instant whether to get up and

walk off or throw the glass of water in his face. The fact that she had invited conversation by sitting down beside him made her furious at herself. How could anybody talk to a hard-headed person like Steve Matson! "While you're about it," she inquired crisply, "why don't you make something out of my rendezvous with Wolfgang Grunheit, too? We went to Reno the other night together. And on the way home we stopped off at the Pair-O-Dice and did a little gambling." And as a *piece de resistance* she added, "And we often ski together."

He matched her outburst in sarcasm. "Oh, yes. Your exploits in rescuing people do indicate you've become a very accomplished skier. Anyone would have needed a lot of instruction to ski down to Dead Man's cliff. But I must admit I did not know you had been *dating* your ski instructor. I thought your affections were reserved entirely for Gilmore."

She somehow managed to put a brake on her temper. At least long enough for her to regain control of herself and stabilize her thinking. Suddenly she felt crushed by her own impulsiveness. In a voice that sought to be ameliorative she asked, "Steve, why did you come to the Tamarac today? Or—or did you even come to see me?"

His tone was only a trifle less militant. "Yes, I did come especially to see you," he admitted. "But it doesn't matter what it's about now."

"Should I inquire what it was?"

He shrugged, obviously striving for indifference. "Nothing really important. The fellows in the crew were having a little celebration down at Blue Canyon Tavern. For a minute I just thought—well, I thought you might like to come."

"Celebration?"

"Yes. A little get-together before we break up and leave."

The mention of his leaving sent the same old ache through her. "When is the party?"

"Saturday night."

Her voice echoed with disappointment. "Saturday?"

He looked into the mirror. Into her eyes. Again his big shoulder twisted in a shrug. "I should have known you'd have plans."

She wanted to shout that she would break them. But she couldn't break them. Saturday night was such a terribly special night. It was the evening Dr. Vanderburg was to hold

the consultation on Todd's case. Lynn pulled her eyes away from the mirror and looked down into her coffee cup. "I'm sorry—awfully sorry," she said slowly. "I do have important plans for that evening. Todd—"

"Oh! So it's Gilmore again!" he said with elaborate exasperation, and gave a low laugh. He glanced toward the lobby. "What's he doing right now, waiting for you to get through giving me the brushoff? Well, you can tell him you just did."

"Steve," begged Lynn, "you never give me a chance to explain anything."

"Explain?"

"Yes. This is just like it was about the gambling. You never gave me the chance to tell you why I went to the casino in the first place—why I went to the lumber mill—why I can't go to your party."

He shrugged. "Is there any reason anybody ever goes gambling or pleasure riding with anybody except that they enjoy his company."

"See! There you go again. You don't even consider that people can have many reasons for doing things."

"Even for gambling?"

"Even for gambling," she retorted. "And that if they lose, their losses can be a very serious matter."

"If you gamble," he said piously, "you've got to be prepared to take your losses without crying. You hear all sorts of stories about people losing. Lots of them squander away their money instead of buying their kids milk."

"Steve Matson!" she cried between clenched teeth, his self-righteousness rekindling her temper. "You—you—"

"I'm just stating facts," he allowed. "Gambling is risky business."

It was his avoidance of the real issue that sent her anger soaring even higher. Words suddenly flowed from her lips as if they were coming from a gusher. "I've never been so mad at anybody in my life," she declared. "I'm sorry I ever came to Squaw Valley. If I'd stayed in Los Angeles where I belonged, none of this would have ever happened."

"At least," he said frankly, "you wouldn't have been distressed by knowing me."

"That's right!" she acknowledged hotly. "I wouldn't. I certainly *would* not."

Saturday night.

There were many moments during the three-hour-long interview between Dr. Vanderburg and Todd Gilmore, behind the closed doors of the White Room, when Lynn's mind strayed to the little tavern in Blue Canyon where Steve's farewell party was being held. She wondered if Steve had gone, if he'd taken another girl, if there was anything in the quaint tavern, where they had first met, that would remind him of her. Or if he was still so angry and jealous that he wanted nothing to remind him of her. In the bleak days since they last quarreled she had thought of him a hundred times. If he only knew the facts about Todd Gilmore that had been discussed in this room tonight, Steve Matson would hang his head in shame over his senseless jealousy.

Lynn's mind went back briefly over the long interview as the doctor now sat at her desk opposite Todd, making some last-minute notes on his chart that would precede Todd to the sanitarium in Los Angeles where the doctor proposed he go for treatment. Todd had readily consented. "A year at the sanitarium, and you'll be well again." Dr. Vanderburg had pronounced.

Here in the quiet room, Todd answered the questions the psychiatrist asked him. He readily admitted the two attempts of suicide on the trails near the Tamarac, and to others, years earlier, equally bizarre.

Strangely, the brightest spot in the whole interview had been when Todd spoke proudly of his ownership of the Pair-O-Dice. As he had told Dr. Vanderburg earlier in the interview, he said again now. "The casino's mine. Nobody can tell me how to run it. Nobody."

"And you keep it," Dr. Vanderburg advised, looking up from his note-taking. "Every man must have his own hook to hang his hat on."

Todd glanced skeptically at Lynn. "Lynn isn't much for the casino, Doctor. She's like a lot of people. She think's they're unwholesome."

"I'd be a fine one to criticize," Lynn purported, "after I've been to the Pair-O-Dice myself." She gave an airy laugh. "Maybe one reason I'm against them is because I always lose."

Glancing at her with the same old haunting, possessive look in his eye, Todd said, "I always wanted her to quit when she was ahead."

"I know you did Todd," she said gently.

Again he looked at her with a sort of faraway yearning in his tired eyes, and Lynn knew that he would claim a little part of her for his own always.

Todd spoke again: "With me not around to give you any gambling tips, Lynn, you better stay out of the casinos. You never come out winner if you stick around the casino and put all your chips back in. Nobody does."

Dr. Vanderburg chuckled. "You hardly sound like a gambling operator."

Todd looked sheepish. "Really, Doc, I'm not in the gambling business to make money. I've already got enough to take care of me the rest of my life. It was just—well, like you said—a chance to have a hook for my hat. Something I could call my own. It makes a fortune every night, and I didn't need money." His eyes slid to the floor, and he added quietly, "I've given the earnings away the couple of months I've owned it. Lots of poor people in this mountain country. I've been thinking about taking next year's earnings and building a big recreational center for the mountain people."

Touched, Lynn blurted, "Todd, that's wonderful!" and thought suddenly that as long as she lost her money at gambling, she was glad she lost it at the Pair-O-Dice. And then she had the added thought that if Carmen Marie knew, she would think so, too, and would say that since the money had gone for such a good cause, the house in Fernando Acres could again wait.

Trying to explain Carmen Marie's deep sense of human values to Pearl one afternoon when they were puttering around on skis out on Snowball Hill, Lynn said, "Whatever it is that happens, she always thinks there's a good reason for it. That's why she's been such a good wife for my dad and helped him over so many financial humps. She never sees the gloomy side of things."

"She sounds like the kind of a person you like to be around when you're in trouble."

"Everybody in the neighborhood does. Whenever they have a sick child or there's a death in the family, she's the one they run to. She has a quiet, gentle way with people. Especially very young children."

"Maybe she could help you iron out things with Steve."

Lynn sighed. "Nobody can do that."

"Somebody has to." Pearl pursed her lips into a guilty pout. "I should be ashamed of myself—giving you all that advice about Todd Gilmore and his money."

"Forget it."

"Honey, if I'd really known how crazy you were about Steve, I'd have never said a thing. But I—"

"It doesn't matter," insisted Lynn emptily. "Steve had the chance to make up if he wanted to. The day I followed him into the snack bar."

"Murder!" Pearl groaned. "You sure picked the wrong time to tell him you wanted to forget and forgive—with Todd sitting out in the lobby."

"It wouldn't have mattered. If he really cared for me, he'd trust me," she brooded, feeling the stabbing pain of her own words.

Pearl kicked a clump of ice with the tip of her ski. "If you love him as much as you say, don't be as stubborn as he is," she advised. "Any woman might as well face it. The responsibility for creating a happy courtship is mostly up to her—just like creating a happy marriage is. In fact, it's about ninety per cent up to her. Believe me, you ought to hear some of the broken hearts I talk to over my shampoo board. If nine out of ten women weren't such fools, they could get—and keep—the man they want."

"Well, what do you expect me to do? Keep fawning over Steve?"

"If you love him, you'd better," Pearl staunchly advised. "Lynn, a woman has to make the fellow she adores think he's the only guy in the universe. If he knows this, then he can be the happiest man in the world. Otherwise, he can be the most miserable." She paused. "Just listen to me! Dishing out the advice again."

Lynn overlooked the self-admonition and said thoughtfully, "I—I didn't say that a woman doesn't have to bend an awful lot. But, Pearl. Since the day we had our first quarrel, Steve's never given me the chance to prove how I really feel about him."

"And you never made him listen to the truth about Todd Gilmore. You got mad and let him go on believing what he cared to."

"And I misled him with a pack of lies about dating Wolfgang," she added miserably.

Pearl looked nonplused. "Lynn, you didn't!"

"I got mad and said a lot of things I didn't mean. If Steve had any sense at all, he'd know I didn't mean a word of it. What woman could *ever* like a man like Wolfgang?"

"Oh, lots of women adore him," Pearl substantiated. Suddenly her eyes sparkled. "Speaking of Wolfgang, have you heard the latest about Mrs. Strovel and her daughter?"

"Now, don't tell me something has happened to the count with the crooked nose."

"Plenty has."

"Heavens, no! Not after all the months she's worked to catch him for a son-in-law. They've been living here ever since I've been here."

"Oh, they can afford to with the money they have. But the count suddenly decided he wasn't interested in trading his title for their money. Guess what? He's fallen wildly in love with that cute little ice skater from Aussie. She arrived about ten days ago to begin practicing for the Games—and they've been dating."

"That will be a blow to Mrs. Strovel," Lynn projected, glad for the opportunity to talk about someone else's troubles. She suddenly found herself wondering if the Australian girl would have been a contender against Kay if she had skated. Thoughtfully she mused, "It's sad the way things work out for some people."

"I wouldn't feel sorry for Mrs. Strovel," Pearl returned. "She'll manage to buy the husband she wants for her daughter. At the moment she seems to be looking Wolfgang over as possible material."

"Wolfgang!" Lynn's surprise was mingled with an element of justice. She smiled. "Maybe if he gets a chance to marry a lot of money, it will help make up for the real disappointment he suffered over Kay and Karl dropping out of the Olympics."

"You can't blame him for being crushed about that," Pearl vouched in his defense, "after the months he put in on building them into champions. And really, Lynn, he's not too bad a gent. And you can't deny he's got a sort of glamour about him—and a handsome Greek profile."

"If you like Greek profiles," Lynn allowed. "Personally, he gives me the creeps."

"Why don't you tell Steve that? Why don't you tell him Todd Gilmore gives you the creeps, too?"

Lynn sighed. "When will I *ever* see Steve?"

Pearl shrugged. "That's up to you, honey! If you want him back, you'll find a way. And you shouldn't need road signs to do it, either."

Chapter XIV

A snowslide on Highway 40 that closed the road between the Tamarac and Reno provided Lynn with the excuse she needed to try to heal the breach between herself and Steve. But while the excuse was there all day, it was six-thirty in the evening before she got the courage to pick up the phone in her room and ask the operator to call him at the Tall Pines Motel, where he was still living. Once, when she speculated that he might be enormously irritated at just hearing her voice, her courage faltered, and she almost put the receiver back into the cradle. He had made their last meeting seem so final. So terribly final.

But when the ringing sound came, indicating the connection had been made to his room, there was no turning back. Seated at the small writing desk, she suddenly heard his brusque, husky voice: "Hello."

"Hello, Steve."

"Who's this?"

"It's Lynn," she gulped.

"Oh?"

"What's the matter?" she inquired, groping for casualness. "Has it been so long, you've forgotten my voice?"

"I wasn't expecting to hear your voice," he said. Then he waited.

"I suppose you wonder why I'm calling," she hurried on, knowing she was doing very badly. "But you said—the first time we ever met, remember?—if I ever needed any road information to call you."

"Yes, I remember," he said without expression, as if he were talking to someone he knew only slightly. "What information can I help you with?"

"I heard the road to Reno is closed. They had a snowslide."

"Yes, but it's not a serious one. The road should be open in twenty-four hours."

"Oh, so long?" she replied, as though it were an eternity.

There was a pause, and then Steve said in a slightly milder voice, "Why?"

"Well, I have to go to Reno for some very necessary hospital supplies. I'd hate to wait twenty-four hours. What if they don't get it opened then?"

"They will have it opened late tomorrow," he said with polite confidence. "If what you're going after is important, couldn't you pick it up some place else?"

Her heartbeat quickened. The conversation was going exactly as she had hoped it would. This was the proof. If Steve really cared and wanted to make up, then he'd fall into her trap. Quickly she replied, "That's another thing I wanted to ask about. How is the road to Carson City? Would it be much of a trick to drive it this time of night?"

"Well—it's passable. It's pretty winding in places. And you'll need chains."

"Oh, I don't mind a few turns in the roads," she told him stoutly. "But I will need some directions. Do I drive past Emerald Bay and then turn off where they're building that new—"

"No, no," he cut in. "You'd get lost sure going that way."

He paused, and his voice took on a note of unexpected anxiety. "You're not making the drive alone, are you?"

"I had planned to. Wong Duck—that's the Chinese cook—loaned me his pickup."

There was a very lengthy pause. Then, perfunctorily, he inquired, "Would you like me to drive you?"

Would she? But she must not be overly anxious. "Oh, no, Steve. I wouldn't want to bother you."

"It wouldn't be a bother."

She acquiesced slightly. "Are—are you sure?"

"Very sure. When would you like to go?"

"Oh, that's awfully nice of you. I could be ready in an hour."

"Okay. I'll be there."

Her heart hammered. "Good-bye, Steve—and thanks lots."

"Good-bye."

For a long minute after she had hung up the phone she sat with her hand clutched to the receiver, the memory of his husky voice surrounding her. Suddenly a happy, half-mischievous smile quirked her lips. *Knowing what an old crank he is for safety,* she thought, *I knew he wouldn't want me driving that road alone. Just think, in one little hour I'll see him. And* that *means I'll have to rush like a rabbit to be ready.*

Hastily she dressed in her tweed suit and pink blouse, determined that for once he wouldn't find her in a starchy white uniform, looking like a pillar of salt. Pearl's words rang in her mind: *Men like to be with women who are beautiful and feminine. Women who intrigue them.*

Was she intriguing? Lynn asked herself as she stood before the full-length mirror carefully scrutinizing her reflection in the tweed suit with its mannish cut. No, she wasn't. She didn't like what she saw. Resolutely, she stepped to her closet and took from the rack the sapphire blue dress her mother had sent her from Florida. Holding it at arm's length and studying its smart, delicate lines, Lynn smiled with satisfaction. *I hope he thinks I look feminine and intriguing enough in this. At least it will make my eyes nice and blue.* Quickly she skinned out of the suit. . . .

Later, as she and Steve drove down the winding road toward Nevada, Lynn was again reminded of something else that Pearl had said: *Men are like little boys. They love praise.* Steve revealed he was not excluded from this group when she said, "A lot of guests at the hotel say your road-widening job has certainly helped the traffic situation on 40."

He seemed pleased. "Well—the chief wasn't sorry we got through twelve days ahead of schedule," he said proudly. And suddenly, without any of the former aloofness in his tone, he added, "Now he's switching us to Marysville to repair a road that comes into 40 from the north. Every inch of highway counts—with those big crowds coming for the Games."

"Really, it doesn't seem possible the Olympics will be here so soon. They were months away, and then suddenly they're almost here."

"Suppose you're getting a lot of Olympic guests already."

"Some. The early arrivals are the ones from the foreign countries. People from Switzerland, France, Canada. Pearl

told me the Tamarac was booked up all through February."

"Pearl would know, wouldn't she?" There was a pause, as if the transfer of information suddenly reminded them both how alien had been their relations.

Lynn made an effort to ease the uncomfortable moment. "When you move to your new job, Steve, will you ever get to come back and watch any of the Games?"

When he answered, his voice was both brusque and tender. "Would you give a tinker's damn if I did or didn't?"

Her heart lurched. "I—I'd give a great big tinker's damn."

She watched his hands clutch the steering wheel tighter. His eyes stayed fixed on the road ahead. "We did have a lot of fun together around this old place," he mused.

"We've had a lot of wonderful times." She paused. "I mean, we did before Todd Gilmore started getting lost in the snow."

His lighthearted mood changed abruptly, and he groaned, "Are we going to drag that guy into our conversation tonight?"

"Perhaps we'd better, Steve," Lynn said, following his eyes down the snow-packed highway. "It's time I explained to you about Todd."

Acquiescently, he said, "Go ahead, if there's anything to explain."

"There's something quite important and quite tragic. Did you know he had been moved to a sanitarium in Southern California?"

Steve remained silent.

"Well, he has. You see, the night you had your party at the Blue Canyon Tavern, Dr. Vanderburg—he's a psychiatrist from Los Angeles—held a consultation with him in my office. That's why I couldn't go to your party. He found that he was seriously in need of medical help and suggested he be hospitalized for at least a year."

"Oh," Steve said in a voice that was genuinely regretful. "I —I didn't know that."

"His suicide attempts were an outgrowth of his emotional condition. Fortunately, though, Dr. Vanderburg thinks he's a good candidate for complete recovery. It's very sad. If only Todd's family had checked into his condition earlier, he could have been helped a long time ago."

"With all their dough you'd think they would have."

"Money doesn't buy happiness, that's for sure," Lynn said

flatly. She gave a small laugh. "I think Todd Gilmore would have been happier if he hadn't had so much of it."

"Well, he won't have any shortage of it in the future," Steve proclaimed, "the way his Pair-O-Dice casino is coining it every night."

"Maybe you won't believe it, Steve, but Todd isn't interested in how *much* the Pair-O-Dice makes. Remember I told you he wasn't a professional gambler?"

"Whoever heard of a casino operator not caring about the take."

"Oh, Todd cares some," she acknowledged. "But not for himself. He gives it to the underprivileged people who live around Squaw Valley in the mountains. Next year, after he gets out of the sanitarium, he intends to take all the earnings and build a recreational center for them."

"Really?" Steve gave a big, awkward sigh. "I guess you know by now I feel just like a big jackass."

Lynn took the blame. "No, it's really my fault. I should have told you about him. But you're so stubborn when you're jealous. You didn't give me a chance."

"I wouldn't have been jealous if I weren't so darn crazy about you." He stopped abruptly. "Say! If he's such a philanthropist, why didn't he give you a tip on how to keep from losing your money?"

"He did. But I didn't listen. I'm stubborn, too."

"Well, maybe it's a good thing you got burned."

"It is. I learned a good lesson."

"The hard way," he interposed.

She gave him a quick glance out of the corner of her eye. "I never did tell you what I was going to use that money for."

"No."

"I was going to help my dad and stepmother buy a small home."

Steve looked aghast. "Murder! How much did you lose?"

"Don't let me mislead you. It wasn't much. Altogether around four hundred dollars." She looked down into her lap. "You're accustomed to thinking in larger figures than my folks are. The five hundred dollars I planned to contribute toward the second payment was quite a lot of money to them. You see, they don't have very much." Suddenly she stopped, straightened in the seat. "Just listen to me! What am I telling you all my hard luck problems for?"

"Don't you think I want to hear every little thing about you?"

His confession sent a rush of undiluted happiness through her. Her eyes sparkled. "There is something, Steve, I'd like to tell you about them. Something awfully nice."

"They're coming up for the Games?"

"No. It's something that happened to my stepmother. You know that television program 'Queen of Los Angeles'? It's something like 'Queen for a Day.'"

"The one where the contestants tell their hard-luck stories and then get a lot of loot?"

"Carmen Marie's wasn't a hard-luck story," Lynn assured him proudly. "But oh! Did she receive a lot of wonderful gifts! A set of matched luggage, a freezer full of frozen food, a living room rug, some sterling silver—a gift of twelve pairs of shoes which are all different—" She paused. "Let me think! What else! Oh yes, there were twelve lessons from a slenderizing salon and a baby crib, which, of course, she didn't need at all."

"Good gosh!" Steve said happily. "With all that loot she can start furnishing the new house. But you haven't told me what story she told to get all the prizes."

"She just told about her project to teach American children how to speak Spanish. You know, she's Spanish. She speaks the language fluently. And she's so patient when she's trying to show somebody anything. But I should explain these aren't just plain children she's teaching. They're crippled children. Just think! With a part-time job and a family of her own, she donates four afternoons a week to this work. Oh, Steve! Isn't she wonderful?"

"She must be a grand person." Steve paused. "Say, couldn't she earn the money herself to buy a house if she'd start charging for the lessons?"

"Oh, Carmen Marie would never do that. She has to give some talent of her own to others who need it. Otherwise, she would think she was taking too much from life without giving her share. She's that kind of a person. She'd rather give than take."

Steve speculated, "I bet she raised a fuss about taking money from you for the house."

Lynn smiled. "No, she didn't. On the contrary, she was thrilled about it. You see, she knew how I loved and appreciated all the things she did for me when I was growing up.

I'm sure she wanted me to have the pleasure of doing something for her. She knew I really wanted to do it. She wouldn't have spoiled my surprise." Lynn stopped, looked out into the moonlit night. "And then I ruined everything and threw the money away gambling. Now we can't take up the option on the house."

"Hey, four hundred dollars isn't a mint."

"We're short more than just the four hundred," she explained, thinking of the deficit in Carmen Marie's fund due to her father's illness. "We're still short about seven hundred to close the deal."

"Then you'll have to have the option extended," he stated practically. "And in the meantime, you'll have to save like a miser to get that amount together."

Her voice lifted. "Really? Could I have the option extended?"

"Of course, but you'll have to work fast." He grinned. "And you'll have to stay out of those dens of iniquity if you ever expect to save that much."

"I'm cured."

"You better be, you dumb little bonehead," he said tenderly, reaching for the sleeve of her coat and tugging her closer to him on the seat. "Move over closer to me," he ordered brusquely.

Her heartbeat quickened. It was the old Steve talking again. Steve, with the same bossy sweetness in his voice, the same strong hard arms that could hold you so tight you hurt. His arm slipped across her shoulder and she nuzzled her head against him. She murmured, "The cops will arrest you for driving with just one hand."

"Buster's the only copper on this beat. I'll punch him in the nose if he tries it."

She laughed. "You won't have to. It's Monday. Square dance night at the lodge."

"Your day off. You won't have to be home early then."

"Goodness, Steve," she cried, pretending great surprise, "you're not thinking of inviting me to one of those horrid gambling dens? After the lecture!"

"No. That's for sure. But I was thinking that when you finished your shopping, we could go to dinner and maybe dance a little."

"Oh—oh, yes, my shopping," she suddenly remembered. "I just have to pick up a few medical supplies at the drugstore."

She gave a gay laugh. "I didn't know this was going to turn into a party. Thanks. I'd love going dinner-dancing."

He took her hand and clasped it tightly. In a low, warm voice he murmured, "I'd love going clear to the moon tonight as long as you would be with me."

They came abruptly to the city limits of Carson City. The street that led toward the downtown area was punctuated with the familiar sight of gaming houses and the little wedding chapels, gaudy by night with their neon-lighted signs.

Lynn commented, "Kay Lane was married by a justice of the peace along here. I was her maid of honor."

"Yeah, I know."

"How did you know that? The wedding was all very hush-hush."

Steve looked sheepish. "Pearl told me. She told me all about the wedding. All about the baby, too."

"Did she tell you they were forced to drop out of the Olympics because of the baby?"

"Don't you know Pearl never misses any of the fine points?"

Lynn hesitated. "Did—did she tell you, too, that was the night I had my date with Wolfgang?"

He grinned. "She also told me you thought he was a square."

"Say, if you knew all these things, why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't know until an hour ago. Not until I was waiting for you in the lobby and talked to Pearl. Pearl who sees all, hears all, and tells all." He stopped, pointed to a neon sign that said: The Wedding Band. And then in small letters: *Marriages Arranged Any Hour.*

"I dare you," Steve murmured.

Her heart raced. "You dare me to what?"

"Marry me," he whispered.

"Steve!"

"You'd make a beautiful bride in that pretty blue dress. Gosh, darling, it makes your eyes look just like sapphires."

She murmured, "I suppose Pearl told you I'd say yes—if you ever asked me."

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